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BEADLE'S FRONTIER SERIES

DEADWOOD DICK'S DOZEN;

— OR —

THE FAKIR OF PHANTOM FLATS.

BY ED. L. WHEELER.



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The Fakir of Phantom Flats.

By EDWARD L. WHEELER.

Author of "Deadwood Dick" Novels, "Rosebud Rob"
Novels, "Denver Doll" Novels, Etc.

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Deadwood Dick's Dozen; Or, The Fakir of Phantom Flats.

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CHAPTER I.

Black Bob's Retreat.

It was a dark, stormy night in the month of May, when a grizzling rain swept down over the mountain and through the gulch. Intense darkness made the landscape one great blank, and the occasional rumble of thunder added to the wildness of the night.

Struggling with this storm and darkness, two persons on horseback rode through a rugged mountain defile in charge of a third person, who rode behind them, and kept them covered with a repeating rifle.

The two captives were plainly not residents of that section, for both were ladies, and their attire indicated that they were fresh from the East.

One was a young lady of some seventeen or eighteen

years, who, though muffled up in a waterproof, was plainly a graceful figure, and whose partly exposed face showed her to be very pretty.

Her companion was an elderly spinster of angular form and vinegar features, and every jolt of the horse she rode, as it stumbled along through the night, elicited from her a groan.

The man who rode in the rear was a ruffianly-looking fellow, who preserved a grim silence, not even condescending to answer any of the questions now and then propounded by the spinster.

"Oh, ye needn't be so cluss-mouthed, ye big overgrown wretch!" she snapped, after one of her failures to elicit a response from the captor. "You're nothin' but a mean, nasty brute, an' ye orter be horsewhipped and tar-an'-feathered."

"There! there! aunty, don't say anything more. There is no use," the young woman said. "We are captives, and there is nothing left for us to do but make the best of it. As soon as papa gets to Phantom Flats, he will get the Vigilantes out and hunt for us. Don't fear but what papa and Mr. Gerald will find us."

"But the ugly brute said we would be held for ransom."

"True, but there can be no doubt but what we will be rescued."

"Oh! dear, dear! I wish I had never come to this terrible country. No civilization, no churches, no nothing here but ruffianism."

And Miss Maria Spilkins relapsed into silence.

A word of explanation just here might not be amiss.

Miss Spilkins's companion was Miss Agnes Blye, to whom she was in no way related, however, having for years been a member of the Blye family, first as Agnes's nurse, then as her attendant.

Agnes was the only child of Captain Boston Blye, a prominent Western stock speculator, and their home had, until recently, been in Virginia City, since when they had resolved to move to the new mining-camp which had sprung up among the gold-hills of Arizona under the ominous name of Phantom Flats.

Phantom Flats, a dull camp, had existed several years, but it was only within a few months that developments

of a profitable character had given to the place a decided "boom."

It was while en route for the Flats by stage that the capture of Agnes and her maiden companion had occurred.

A dozen mounted roughs had pounced down upon the stage and secured the ladies, without offering to take Captain Blye or Miss Blye's lover, George Gerald, into custody.

They had been notified, however, that a ransom would be fixed upon the ladies, and that they would never be seen again until the ransom was paid.

The captain of the party not being present, Captain Blye was informed that he would be duly notified of the ransom required to secure his daughters' release.

The stage had then been ordered to continue on its way to Phantom Flats, and after its departure Agnes and Miss Spilkins had been turned over to the charge of their present keeper, who was to conduct them to the stronghold of Black Bob, the brigand, the main party remaining behind to look after the Eastern-bound stages.

Such was the situation of affairs as we open our narrative; and although brave Agnes Blye had many misgivings for her future safety, she tried to keep up as brave a spirit as possible.

For hours they rode on, under the direction of their brigand guard, who rejoiced in the title of Coyote; then, about midnight they suddenly debouched upon a high mountain plateau, which overlooked a large area of the rugged, mountainous and timbered country below.

A hedge of pines fringed the edge of this mountain fastness on its front, and from the plateau a cave opened back into the overhanging mountain.

As Coyote and his captives rode up on the plateau a brawny Indian darted to the mouth of the cave and lit a heap of dry sticks and pine-cones, and a bright glare almost immediately illuminated the scene with great distinctness.

The ladies were assisted to dismount, and Coyote led them forward into the cave, where another fire burned, while the Indian took charge of the horses.

Within the cavern the furnishings were after the rude style usual to the mountaineer's home—a few stools, tables,

piles of skins, a barrel of whisky, cooking utensils and weapons.

A man was seated near one of the tables, engaged in smoking a long-stemmed pipe. He was of large, powerful frame, and his garments were jetty black, even to black gloves upon his hands.

His hair was of a like hue, and a full mask upon his face effectually concealed the features from view.

A keen pair of eyes surveyed the prisoners as they were ushered into his presence.

"Hyer they are, boss!" Coyote saluted with a grin, as he shoved the ladies forward into the light. "We captured 'em without any trouble, and hyer they am. One's young and purty, and the t'other she's a wilted cabbage-leaf."

"Oh, you wretch! Wait till I get a good chance to scratch your eyes out!" Miss Spilkins gasped.

Black Bob gave an unappreciative grunt.

"What did ye tell Blye?" he demanded, gruffly.

"I sed to him as how the ladies would be held for ransom, an' you'd let him know the figgers," Coyote answered.

"Correct! The captain can afford to pan out right handsome. The girl is worth—let me see. Take off your wraps, young woman, so one can get a fair look at you. Come, be lively. I don't stand no squeamishness. I'm a bad man when I'm crossed."

"You are no gentleman, to use a woman as a means of extorting money!" Agnes retorted, taking off the hood of her waterproof and revealing a face of exceeding beauty.

"You are wrong. I am a thoroughbred gentleman in my way. By Jove! I had no idea you had grown to be so beautiful! No wonder Blye is proud of you! Then you're valuable, too. I think, on the whole, that I shall have to put a valuation on you of ten thousand dollars, my dear!"

"Sir, you will find out your great mistake when my father brings the Vigilantes down upon you!"

"Bah! there is no living person outside my own band that suspects the location of my retreat. If your father don't come to terms—But, pshaw! you're cheap to him, he believes, at any price!"

"Who are you, sir, that seems to know of my father?" Agnes demanded, her curiosity aroused.

"Ha! ha! that's rather a conundrum, my dear! I'm generally known as Black Bob, but what other name I might own is a matter of conjecture. Sufficient for you that I know both you and your father, and the prime motive of his coming to Phantom Flats. I had no idea of your being so pretty, however, and it is quite possible I may conclude not to accept a ransom for you, but to keep you here and make you my wife!"

"I become your wife? Never, sir—I abhor the very sight of you. If you don't restore me to my father at once, you will be severely punished."

"Never fear. Black Bob is a man that few persons care to oppose. Coyote, I will keep the girl here. You go to the Flats and see how much ransom can be extorted from Blye. Mind you don't get caught."

"What are you going to do with the old woman, boss?"

"Oh! take her and give her to Red Deer. He can either scalp her or make her his squaw."

Without ado Coyote seized Miss Spilkins and forced her, screaming, from the cave—Black Bob in the meantime keeping a pistol leveled at Agnes.

"You sit still, my dear!" he cautioned in a way that showed he meant it. "The old woman will be all right in Red Deer's custody, unless she goes to shooting off her mouth, when, ten to one, he'll raise her hair. As for you, beauty, I'll——"

He did not finish the sentence, but broke off into a reverie, his masked face being turned toward the fire for some moments.

Poor Agnes! With a white face and sinking heart she watched him until he should be ready to speak, wondering if he were not in a measure going to relent.

He finally looked up, but spoke more as though he were deliberately consulting with himself.

"Yes, yes; it's a nice little game, and why shouldn't I have a hand in it, too? Money is an object to me as much as it is to Boston Blye, no matter if it is dishonestly gotten. Gods! I hardly expected I was striking so rich a bonanza when I ordered the stage stopped!"

"Didn't you?"

Black Bob looked up with a cry of surprise to behold a man standing in his presence.

"Great God! Deadwood Dick!" the brigand yelled, leap-

ing to his feet, while his hands dropped to the weapons in his belt.

But the gentleman who had so suddenly appeared upon the scene held him covered with a gleaming revolver.

Deadwood Dick!

Agnes Blye's heart gave a bound.

She had heard much of the daring Apollo of the West; of his escapades, stage-coach exploits and other reckless deeds; then, too, she had heard many a miner eulogize him as being as square a man and as thorough a gentleman as the West could produce, when not crowded upon or wronged.

The comparison between him and Black Bob was so striking, it was little wonder that Agnes felt a degree of relief at the Sport's coming.

Handsome as ever, in his resolute, manly fashion, his dark eyes burning brightly, and that natural cool expression upon his face, adorned with its graceful mustache and clean-cut features, Deadwood Dick looked no older than when during the feverish days of '77 he had made his name a terror in the Black Hills country.

He was attired in kneeboots, light colored pants, a white flannel shirt, open at the throat, a dark jacket and a jaunty sombrero turned up at one side.

Besides the revolver in his grasp, his belt contained two more of the same pattern, and a knife, the handle of which was brilliant with sparkling stones.

Around his neck and attached to his watch in a small pocket at the top of his pants was a massive chain of solid gold—a regular "log-chain" an Easterner would have termed it.

At the furious recognition and cry of Black Bob a smile of triumph broke over the countenance of Deadwood Dick, while Agnes arose and stood with pale, expectant face awaiting the issue.

"Yes, Deadwood Dick, Bobby!" the Sport retorted. "I fancy that in your little nook up here you felt so secure as to have lost all recollection that a sleuth was on your track."

"Curse you! What brings you here? You have run yourself into my trap at last, you devil."

"But broke the spring, Robert, ere I entered. We are all alone here with no one to bother us. We can hold one

of the most interesting of conferences without any trouble; in fact, can come to a settlement. Take care! don't for the world be so rash as to attempt to draw a pop, as over goes your load of hay at once. You know me, Bobby—you know just what an eccentric individual I am, for, although the palmist forgot to mention me, and I never ran for President, my name is quite numerously known in the West."

"The devil take your name and you, too. What do you want here? Speak up, before I mangle you!"

"Well, Bobby, to be plain out and out, I have come for you. You're wanted at Yuba Creek, where you murdered a miner, his wife, daughter and aged mother, in expectation of getting a big haul of gold."

"It's a lie! I didn't do nothin' o' the sort. It war Jim Lacey—I sw'ar it was!"

"Oh, no! James was accessory, but he only did outside duty, and you killed him afterward. He lived long enough to give you away, however, and that's why I swore to hound you down to the death. You're too bad a man to breathe the pure air of this mountain wilderness, Bob; the very foliage where you go will become blighted. I swore to avenge the murder of the Laverill family, and I will do it. I am going to kill you! Not yet, though. Who is this young lady?"

"None of your business," the ruffian sullenly growled, watching a chance to draw a weapon and gain an advantage.

"Miss, your name, please?" Dick said, briefly.

"Agnes Blye, sir."

"Where from?"

"Virginia City."

"Where bound?"

"We were bound for Phantom Flats, sir. My father has gone on for help."

"Humph! Is this man anything to you or your father?"

"I do not know him, sir. Oh! Heaven! look out!"

Too late!

Black Bob had, with lightning quickness, snatched a revolver from his belt and fired at the mountain sleuth.

His haste, however, had spoiled his aim, for the bullet had only grazed his intended victim's shoulder.

"A tooth for a tooth!" escaped Deadwood Dick's lips.
"The law can't have you, Black Bob!"

The same instant the Sport fired.

With a groan the bandit staggered back a few paces, reeled and fell heavily, when he lay like a dead man.

"Come, miss," the Sport said, "I will see you safely to the Flats."

"But my companion——"

"She escaped the redskin and fled into the gulch below. There's no use trying to find her now. Your own safety must be looked for."

In ten minutes they were far on their journey.

CHAPTER II.

Boston Blye Meets Shrimp.

Deadwood Dick had mounted his protege upon one of the outlaw's fastest horses, and after reaching the canyon they were able to make good progress, Miss Blye proving to be a good rider.

The storm, too, had abated, and the night had grown lighter.

After an hour's ride, during which not a word was spoken, Deadwood Dick drew rein and signaled Agnes to do likewise.

"Miss Blye," he said, "I have a word to say to you before going further. Have you lived long in the West?"

"Some time, yes, sir."

"Then you perhaps know something of the repute of Deadwood Dick?"

"I have often heard of you, sir—stories both good and bad."

"Your frankness I like. It's a fact I am possessed of a rather dark reputation, and have led a rough-and-tumble life; hence, until I fight myself into favor in a town, I generally am in hot water, and most infallibly find some old enemy in each new locality, who takes pleasure in introducing me to the citizens, who as invariably consider it an honor to try and assist me to shuffle off this mortal coil. The Flats is a new camp to me, and if I were to boldly enter it in your company, it might possibly not be pleasant for either of us—especially you. It therefore is my plan to leave you for a few hours in a safe place while I go on to the town, hunt up your father, and quietly conduct him here to take charge of you. That will save all danger, and all will be right."

"Oh! sir, but you are venturing into peril on my account. Pray do not do that. I would rather accompany you and thus share the risk."

"Lady, you are wrong. You are not one to brave peril, when I, whose very life is made up of peril and adventure, am able to act in your behalf. There is a cave near, where I have twice stopped, and there I will leave you.

until I can see your parent, promising you that no harm will come to you."

"If you deem best, sir, you can rest assured I will wait your return. You have already done me a great service in rescuing me."

"Don't mention it. Come!"

They soon reached the cave, a small but comfortable place, where Dick kindled a little fire and left her his blanket to lie upon.

"I will not set any certain hour for my return," he said, when ready to depart, "but will go carefully at work in your behalf, and bring you your father as soon as I can, without peril to us both. I'll now bid you good-by."

The stage containing the Blye party had been stopped in the latter part of the afternoon some six miles from Phantom Flats; consequently it was not dark when the captain and his prospective son-in-law, George Gerald, arrived in the new mining-camp.

"Say nothing of our loss!" Blye had cautioned both Gerald and the Jehu. "I mean to go at the matter cautiously and secretly, and so can do better work."

Of course Gerald assented, and a ten-dollar note—for the passengers had not been robbed of money—secured the silence of the driver.

Captain Boston Blye was a man of five-and-forty years, thick set and short in stature, with a full face, dark eyes and jetty hair and mustache, which gave him something of a stern aspect; then, too, the habitual expression of his countenance was more disagreeable than pleasant by far.

George Gerald was a well-built, handsome looking fellow of four-and-twenty, with light complexion, hair and mustache; he was an easy-going, habitually-lazy New Yorker, of good family, but alone in the world, rich as a prince, and on a tour of travel and adventure.

He had met Agnes, the two had fallen in love, and, although there was no engagement, it was as good as understood that they would soon wed.

After finding who Gerald was and the state of his finances, Captain Blye had helped along the matter to the best of his ability, and never missed a chance to, privately, urge his daughter to hasten matters to a climax.

Blye had been a heavy speculator in stocks, and was a

very silent man as to his business successes and reverses, but up in his own district those who ought to have been able to form a fair opinion, were wont to doubt that Blye was very well "heeled."

A few weeks before Blye's departure from Virginia City a large robbery had taken place, a broker being the chief victim, although several who had left moneys with him for safe keeping had also suffered, Blye losing a thousand dollars, while Gerald had lost five thousand.

The same night a city roue, named Leon Shrimp, had disappeared, and the crime was charged upon him. A reward was offered for his capture, and detectives were set to work up the case.

Shrimp had once been a clerk for Blye, and a suitor for the hand of Agnes, but after Gerald's arrival he suddenly ceased to move in society and became low spirited and dissipated.

After this much necessary explanation, we will proceed with our story.

As soon as they arrived at the Flats, the captain at once secured a room for himself and Gerald at the barn-like hotel, and ordered supper brought up to them.

While it was in waiting, the captain slipped out to find the post-office and get a drink.

Phantom Flats was not a large settlement, although its increase in population was daily noticeable; so that Blye soon found the post-office, which, together with the telegraph office, was situated within the then only saloon and gaming resort in the camp—a one story affair, that floored over half an acre, and was supplied with a bar, lunch-counter, chairs and tables, a big orchestrion, and the many different devices for gambling.

This place was run by a man named Picard, and was known as the "Fort."

It was well filled, considering its size, when Blye entered, but paying no attention to the crowd, he hurried direct to the portal window.

A woman attended behind the delivery—a woman dressed in costly silk, with diamonds liberally displayed upon her person—a woman with fair hands, but strangely enough her face was securely hidden behind a veil, and no trace of it could be seen, not even the eyes.

"Is there mail here for Captain Blye?" the speculator asked, after a surprised stare at her.

"No letters—no papers—a telegram," her muffled voice replied, as she shoved it toward him. "Twenty-five cents extra please."

Blye paid the charge and sat down at a vacant table near by and ordered liquor, after which he slowly tore open the envelope, his face the scene of some emotion. It grew whiter, however, when he read the message.

It ran thus, and was from Virginia City:

"B. E.—Watch sharp and catch a 'fish.' He's well built, handsome, a dare-devil; has long, flowing hair, a mustache, both dark; is a dead-shot, has a hundred aliases, but is the noted outlaw, Deadwood Dick. There are several rewards for him; besides it's to your interest to plant him. Generally dressed in black. More by mail. U Know."

Captain Boston Blye did not seem highly pleased at what he had read.

"What the devil can it mean?" he hoarsely muttered, after drinking his liquor. "Can it be that——"

"You bet it can, captain!"

A low, significant voice sounded these words in Blye's ear, and he leaped to his feet with a curse, and wheeled about.

He then sunk back, white as death.

It was not a bona fide ghost that he saw, but the human who caused his surprise, evidently could not have increased the effect, if he had been from the other realms.

"Leon Shrimp!" the captain gasped. "Great God! I thought you dead."

"So I presume," the other replied, he being a young man, with a full beard, shrewd, dark eyes, and a general expression of cunning about him.

His beard was evidently false; but that was of little moment, as there were a dozen others in the place whose hirsute adornment was not of their own growth.

"So I presume," Shrimp repeated with a sneer; "but you see your mistake. I'm as lively as a cricket. Where shall we adjourn to, captain, to have a little private conversation? Ah! yonder's a quiet corner. Come along."

Pale and nervous the speculator obeyed.

Shrimp led the way to a table in a then untenanted corner of the room, and ordered a bottle of liquor.

When it came he paid for it, and said:

"Help yourself, Blye. Bless your heart, you look like a still. I hope my appearance hasn't frightened the wits out o' you?"

And he laughed in a steely way.

"Probably not," Blye growled. "What do you want?"

"A chat. Why, you ain't inclined to be a bit sociable."

"Not with you, sir. Your palaver don't deceive me at all. What you have to say, say in a few words. You think you have me foul; let's know your programme."

"Well, there's no sensible use of hurrying into a perspiration. Tell the truth now, Blye; we're two shrewd men, whom church people and the like might call villains—but tell the truth; you're rather ashamed of yourself, ain't you?"

"What for? I don't see it."

"You don't? I thought you'd own up. What have I always been to you, Boston Blye—a tool? Exactly, or worse still, a dashed fool. Admit it."

"Go on. I hope you'll wind out soon."

"I'm not easily winded. I served you, did your villainous work, and helped to fatten your coffers until the cussed Easterner came. You not only shoved me then, but told me I could never have your Agnes, whom you had faithfully promised to me."

"Bah! I never promised her to you."

"You lie! But it matters not. Let it pass now. I knew my time would come—that you couldn't get along without me. Ha! ha! was I wrong? No! Your finances got in a bad shape. Your cheek was hard; but you had borrowed of Gerald until you couldn't try again. Money you must have. You called on me. I refused to be seen. I told you to write. You did so—wanted to hire me. Letter by letter I drew out of you, until before me lay your whole plan and time for robbing Schuler, the broker."

"For God's sake, lush!" Blye gasped, glancing around. "Walls have ears!"

"Bah! not saloon walls of one thickness of boards. To go on; you hired me to help you. I was to get one-third, and do nothing but pick the safe lock. I did it. You then picked me, with a loaded cane, and left me outside, to die,

while you got the funds. I didn't die. Oh! no. Tough cocoa, mine! I gathered your letters, folded my tent and stole away, having previously caught a report that you proposed to hie this way."

"Well?"

Blye seemed too used up to speak, more than in brief words.

He knew he was in the hands of his own tool, whom he had given just cause to be his bitterest enemy.

It was useless to deny the fact; he could but await the man's own time and purpose.

"Well," Shrimp went on. "I see you are expecting a friend from Virginia City—a mermaid—a fish, for you to catch, if you don't want to get nibbled at yourself. Do you know this Deadwood Dick?"

"I have heard of him."

"Oh! he's a streak of lightning—a detective by nature. I'd rather have a bloodhound on my scent. How do you suppose an honorable citizen like you should have been suspicioned, Blye?"

"How am I to know? You are at the bottom of it, of course."

"No! honor bright. It wouldn't avail me to give you up to the law until I work you awhile. See?"

And he grinned triumphantly.

"Curses seize you!" Blye gasped.

"Thank you; but they never take kindly to me! I'm too much for 'em. And now, as it is, you see what there is to do."

"What?"

"Firstly, take me candidly into partnership and whack up even. Secondly, marry me to the girl."

"She is not here!"

"You are lying."

"No. She is in the power of Black Bob, the bandit."

"Furies! This is bad. But she can be recovered. You have my proposal. I await your answer."

"What do you want?"

"Half of the haul—six thousand dollars. That will do for the first. Next I want half out of what you make by coming here to this camp."

"What do you mean?"

"You know—so do I. Sufficient be that for now. Next, I want the girl."

"Then what?"

"You can depend that your secrets are forever buried, so far as I am concerned!"

"And if I refuse?"

A faint smile lit up Shrimp's face.

"If you refuse, eh? Well, you see the burly chap over yonder, who looks like a prairie pirate?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll hand you over to him. You'll get a free ride back to V. C."

"Well, I'll think the matter over by morning."

"Will you? You are kind. You have five minutes by yonder clock. A word will fetch Leonzo, the deputy."

A desperate gleam was in the speculator's eyes, but he knew to his despair there was no hope—at least none until another time.

"Give me the letters, and here's the money," he said.

"You've got the grip, and I'll weaken."

"I'll take the money now; you'll get the papers after the girl's mine. By the way, are we to join issues in beating your snobby New Yorker?"

"Yes, if you must have a hand in."

"How is it to be done?"

"I'll deliberate upon a plan. First, we must recover Agnes, and you must keep in the background—don't make no interference—until we fleece him well."

"Right. I'm no fool. I'll not push my suit, and we are strangers in his persence—see? It will work better. If you use me square, Boston Blye, I will you, and you shall have the papers. If you make a trickish move I'll hand the papers to the sleuth that is coming here to see you."

"I'll be square. Here's the money."

Blye had been dividing the contents of a large roll of bills.

Shrimp seized his share eagerly, and counted the notes.

"Correct!" he said, arising. "About that other matter I hinted at—when you get it under way, why we'll split it over. Seen about the girl soon. Good-night!"

And although forced to yield to this self-confident rogue, Captain Blye felt relieved when he was gone.

He then left the saloon and returned to the hotel.

CHAPTER III.

A Story of the Past—The Dumb Dozen.

Not more than a mile below Phantom Flats, in the gulch, was an old tumble-down hut or lodge, built partly of skins, partly of sticks, stones, thatchings of grass, and bits of bark.

In fact, it appeared that at the time it was built, anything and everything was used in its construction which could help to make it a comfortable place of habitation.

It stood pretty securely hidden under the shade of a clump of balsams, and not every passerby would have noticed it.

To reach Phantom Flats, Deadwood Dick had to pass this place; but he was riding musingly along, and paying little attention to his surroundings, when his horse was suddenly stopped, and he found that a dozen men surrounded him, each one of whom held a goodly-sized pistol leveled toward him.

It was a genuine surprise; but he had no one to blame but himself, and made up his mind to get out of the scrape as best he could.

"Hello, boys, how are you?" he saluted. "Glad to see you. How's all the folks, and what d'ye want?"

One of the number stepped closer to Dick's side, and went through a series of motions of the mute language.

"Hello! So you're not gifted with that great accomplishment—gab!" Dick said. "Let one o' yer gang speak."

The leader motioned to indicate that the remaining eleven were also mutes.

Dick then took a closer look at them, and the result was astonishment.

Twelve there were, and each man dressed from top to toe in black; all were of a height, nearly of a weight, and the same might be assumed of their ages.

Here the strange likeness did not end.

They were men probably forty years of age, and while their dress was alike, so was their facial appearance.

Twelve closer counterparts would indeed have been the work of a lifetime to find.

Each man had a dusky, rather wildly-handsome face, dark eyes, long jetty hair, falling over broad shoulders, and graceful mustaches waxed out to a straight point from the lips.

Their slouched broad-brims sported plumes, and altogether, a more fantastic party it had never been Dick's fortune to encounter.

"Well, by guns, here's a go!" he mused. "A dozen brothers, evidently, and not a vocabulator among them. Shouldn't wonder if they'd like me to pan out my loose shekels. Unfortunately I haven't but a single gold eagle. Hello, Cap! Just sing out, what's the diffikilty?"

The leader went through another series of motions, and pointed toward the hut.

"Want me to go thar, do ye?" Dick said. "Well, I reckon I'll have to oblige, since you are inclined to be persuasive."

He slid from the saddle, and seizing him, arm in arm, the leader led him toward the hut, whose only door was a curtain of tanned skins.

The remainder of the party did not follow.

Within the hut, which contained but one apartment, was considerable space.

A fire of wood burned near the center.

Seated by this, was a man in rags, for his garments were nothing else.

He looked to be very old, for his long hair and huge beard were as white as snow, and what little of his face was exposed from under the beard was deeply wrinkled.

He trembled in every joint, from long shattered nerves, probably, and his eyes had lost the fire of his youth.

Yet he looked up quickly, as the dumb guide pushed Dick into the hut, and nodded, motioning Dick to a seat near the fire.

The guide then retired.

Dick did not become seated, but stood with hat in hand, awaiting the issue.

"Do you want me, sir?" he demanded; "for if not, I have business elsewhere."

"I want you, of course, or should not have sent for you. You were not long on your journey here."

"How do you know, pray?"

"Easy enough. I knew when you left Virginia City, to a moment. Do you see that?"

He pointed to a small table in one corner.

A wire came into the hut through a crevice, and was attached to a telegraph instrument upon the table.

"That brings me news," the old man chuckled. "Whatever news comes to the Flats, comes to me."

"Then it is known at the Flats that I am coming there?"

"Yes."

"By whom?"

"Captain Boston Blye, for one; Poker Kate for another."

"Who is Poker Kate?"

"Postmistress and operator, at the Flats."

"Who sent the news from Virginia City?"

"Some confederate of Blye."

"You seem to know this Blye."

"I fancy I do! That is, I used to."

And the old man looked menacingly at the fire.

"I'm old Jewel, the hermit," he went on, "and for years I've been so. I lived in this gulch and no one knew of it, long before the gold diggers came. They regard me as an old crony of the Evil One, and tell about the heaps of gold I've got hid away, where no one can find it. He! he! that's what they say about old Jewel. Maybe they are right—maybe I have got gold nuggets enough to ballast a railroad. It's mine, ain't it?"

"So I should suppose," Dick answered quickly, although he was beginning to grow curious.

"Of course. Pipó! Pipó!" the hermit fairly shrieked.

In answer to the call, from a box in under a bench in one corner, there emerged a large and exceedingly ugly-looking baboon, who whisked forward, eying Dick suspiciously.

"The nugget, Pipó—the nugget!" old Jewel cried, sharply, and away went the animal out of the hut, like a streak.

Dick was wondering where he was gone, when he came back and laid a huge nugget of gold at Dick's feet.

Huge, because it was solid gold, and larger than a goose egg!

"That's a specimen," the hermit chuckled—"just a sample. Don't wonder they're envious of me, hey, at the Flats! No wonder they send assassins to kill me; means

and goodies to p'izen me. Ho! ho! Pipo is a judge! It's a common remark in the camp, 'Jewel is getting weaker and weaker; he can't last long; then we'll get a whack of his millions.'"

"But you have your singular dozen of protectors?"

"If I were to call upon them, perhaps. Do you know, they're queer 'uns; you an' I are the only ones that even saw 'em, though the other settlers have heard rumors of their existence. No one sees them by day—not even I. They hover over these parts, by night. But of them, later. Would you like to hear how to make a fortune?"

"I don't know. Possibly."

"Then listen. Perhaps you may be aware of the fact that Boston Blye is a rascal?"

"Well?"

"He comes here to Phantom Flats to drive me to the wall. He is a bad man. He means to extort from me the secret of the hiding-place of my gold."

"Indeed! You surely would not allow him to do that?"

"I cannot help myself. He has a lever upon me by which he can twist me at will, unless I have help. I want you to help me defeat this arch-villain. I am an old man, nearing the grave—an old man in trouble, but not old in years. Will you help me out, and do what you can to baffle the schemes of Boston Blye?"

"If I find him to be the man you intimate you can rely on me. It is a part of my business to work against such rascals."

"I am so aware. I have heard of many of your deeds, and your spirit is a counterpart of my own. I'll convince you as to what sort of a man Boston Blye is. I'll tell you a little story.

"Years ago Boston Blye and I were brothers and clerks in a large banking house in Boston, of which he takes his name.

"From early boyhood I had been a faithful servant, and at the age of twenty-two had gained the position of cashier, and had secured for Blye a position as book-keeper. We were bosom chums, and although I wedded the girl for whom we were rivals, he never appeared to be less than a warm friend to me, until the blow came.

"I received a fair salary, and lived in good circumstances, but of course was a little wild, and gambled a

little, drank a little, and belonged to a club. Boston Biggs was my inseparable companion. Least of all men did I think he would ever turn on me. But it came at last. My father, the president of the bank, lay at the point of death, and a great deal of conjecture was made as to how he would leave his large wealth—Boston and I being the only direct heirs. The banking affairs were left almost wholly to my charge at that particular time, and a great robbery occurred. I was arrested, but Boston backed me out; then I hid away from society until my trial should come. My father died and cut me off. Boston came regularly to see me; once he stayed away for weeks; then he came and told me that my wife had secured a divorce and had married an old enemy of mine, William Roberts. It infuriated me when he told me Roberts abused my two-year-old child; he guided me to my residence, where I had not been for months. Through an open window I saw the devil seated in the parlor reading, and without thinking of the consequences I shot him dead. Boston then smuggled me away. The city was made to howl in the search for me, I was told, for I kept too closely hid to learn anything myself. Finally, Boston showed his fangs. He said he was suspected of complicity in the robbery, and that I was in his power; if I refused to write a full confession that I alone had robbed the bank and killed Roberts and also was guilty of several other crimes, he would hand me over to the law. If I obeyed him he would smuggle me out of Boston onto a vessel bound for California. What could I do? To stay and stand my trial in Boston was a thing abhorrent. I made the confession, which he promised never to use except in self-protection; then I fled.

"Did he ever use it?"

"I think not. I bought a year's number of each issue daily in 'Frisco. I saw notices of my being missing and the supposition that I had suicided. But that was all."

"How about the murder?"

"It was stated that after being shot by some person unknown, Roberts fled toward the wharves, disappeared, and was supposed to have staggered into the water, and thus ended the job."

"What became of your wife and child?"

"I do not know. I never heard of them after my flight."

"Are you sure your wife was divorced?"

"Yes. Saved a clipping of the notice, the charge preferred being abandonment and crime. I believe Brown worked the whole thing to ruin me and get the family estate. He afterward sold off everything, and I never heard of him until in Virginia City."

"Does he know you are here?"

"I believe so. I am satisfied he comes expressly to persecute me."

"Perhaps. I will study up the case."

"Thank you. I will guarantee that you shall not go unrewarded for any assistance you do for me. And, now, there's another thing."

"What is it?"

"I have spoken of you to the Silent Tongues. They have elected you their chief. Come!"

He arose and led the way from the hut, by a rear cutaway, and thence through a thicket of chaparral into a mountain cavern of considerable size, with roughly arched ceiling and level, rocky floor.

A fire in the center gave ample light, yet a number of torches burned from niches in the wall.

The cavern showed numerous evidences of being the abode of the "Silent Tongues," such as skin beds, cooking arrangements, weapons, etc., and there were a number of tables strewn with papers.

About these were seated the Dumb Dozen, studiously poring over the rude maps, for such the papers were.

They all arose, however, and bowed low, as Dick and the hermit entered, and the twelve looked toward old Jewel as if expecting him to explain to Deadwood Dick.

"They want me to speak, Deadwood Dick, and I'll tell you what I know of these fellows, who, though one could scarcely believe it, are not in the least related, except as firm friends. They are Frenchmen of good blood, but seven years ago, being charged with communism, were convicted, and escaped to this country. In France, on account of their resemblance, they had always aimed to dress alike and increase the resemblance as much as possible. The same rule has been kept up here.

"On their arrival they came into the wilds of this territory and located a subterranean mine—that is, they discovered a great cavern, rich in gold. A fortune for a world lay before them, and for fear the temptation of tell-

ing others of their great find would be too great, they destroyed the natural entrance and built an intricate and secret one to the deposit—then swore an oath to work faithfully together, but to never open their lips to speak for a period of five years.

"At the expiration of that time they were to divide profits, separate for a year's tour of pleasure, and then return to work until the mine ceased to pay. Well, they did so; for five years they mined, silent but contented, the penalty of a word being death. They amassed a mighty fortune, but only a small part ever left the cave. On reaching civilized parts and trying to speak, to their horror they had no voices! Medical aid failed to help them, and after a year of no pleasure, they met again, all dumb, and their condition was made known to each other. Comparing notes on paper, they decided to spend their future lives in their mine.

"Since then they have sought for it diligently, but in vain. Maps have been made, and every one points to the location as being in the gulch."

"But they fail to find the exact entrance. Was it a shaft?"

"Yes, covered by a patent, beard spring-trap, such as is used in theatres. To step upon it was to drop harmlessly through into a strong netting, from which a ladder descended. The trap was covered with moss, and no one could suspect its existence until he stumbled upon it."

"Have they no idea where it is?"

"But one, and that is that some house in Phantom Flats covers it, and the owner has their secret mine.

"Now the Silent Tongues wish you to represent them as captain, in their search for the mine, they in turn swearing to stand by and protect you from the attacks of your enemies. Is this so, Silent Tongues?"

The unfortunate men bowed.

"Then consider yourselves Deadwood Dick's Dozen, in future, while I will guarantee that if the mine is under the town, it shall be found."

The new chief and his men then had a hearty handshake, after which Dick set out for the Flats.

It had been an eventful night.

CHAPTER IV.

Swilltub, the Slugger.

Deadwood Dick did not arrive at the Flats until the forenoon, purposely waiting on the outskirts, from where, by overlooking the camp, he could form a fair idea of what was going on.

Seeing no signs of unusual excitement he finally boldly entered the place and joined the crowd of new-comers that swarmed in the street.

He was ready and watchful, in case he should be recognized and pounced upon, to defend himself; but he was hopeful that no trouble would occur immediately.

It was his purpose to test the matter, by boldly mingling with the crowds, when, if no one knew him, he should feel safer.

Seeking the hotel first, he found that the captain and George Gerald were registered, but neither were about, so he sought out the huge gaming saloon to see what was going on there.

After a stroll through the place, and a sharp look around him, Dick failed to discover any person answering to Blye's description, although he observed a decidedly Eastern-looking man, whom he inferred might be Gerald, seated by a table, engaged in smoking.

"I'll take the liberty of quizzing him," Dick instantly resolved. "An ounce of points from him is not to be sneezed at. Perhaps I can save him something, too?"

Sauntering up to where Gerald was seated, Dick bowed, and said:

"Excuse me, but have I the honor of addressing Mr. George Gerald, of New York?"

"I am George Gerald, yes, sir," was the reply. "What can I do for you, and by what name may I know you?"

"Ned Harris is my handle. You, I presume, came here with Captain Blye?"

"I did."

"So I supposed. I have been looking for the captain, but haven't found him yet. Do you know where I would be likely to find him?"

"No. He went out to get together a party of scouts for a trip into the mountains, in search of his daughter, who is in the power of the outlaws."

"He will return to you, then, before he leaves the camp?"

"Certainly."

"Then I will wait for him, and save him the trip!"

"What! how do you mean?"

"I mean that Miss Blye was rescued from Black Bob by me, and is now under my care and protection, outside of town, until I can see her father."

"Heaven bless you for those words!" young Gerald said, putting forth his hand. "Since her capture, I have been sadly in fear that harm would come to her, ere we could effect her rescue. You have but to name your price of reward, sir, and I will willingly pay it."

Deadwood Dick took a seat at the table and glanced about the room.

Then he said:

"I'm afraid my terms might be too exacting."

"You can name them, at least, sir."

"I will do so; but, understand me, it is as a friend, with an eye to your interests. You are a tenderfoot and not used to Western ways. Now, will you answer me a few questions?"

"I will try to."

"Very good. You and Miss Blye are lovers, and it's probable will marry."

"Go on!" And the New Yorker flushed with pride.

"The captain is in your debt?"

"How the deuce do you know?"

"I have found out. How much is he in your debt?"

"I don't see what our private affairs can matter to you, sir."

"Only so much, sir, as I rather take a fancy to you, and do not like to see a lamb eaten up by a lion. How much does Mr. Blye represent himself to you as being worth?"

"Fifty thousand in gold mines."

"Humph! And he has pretended to be short of cash, and has borrowed from you on the strength of his mines and his knowledge of your fancy for his daughter?"

"He has."

"Well, all the mines he has you can stick in your eye, and the more you advance him the more you'll be out of pocket. I tell you this, sir, not from any personal spite toward Elye, but because I want you to look out for yourself; and in no way get yourself entangled in coming events."

Gerald looked the great surprise he felt.

"Are you a detective?" he asked, eying the sleuth studiously.

"Well, yes—something of the sort, yes—this privately to you, however."

"And you want me to understand that Blye is not all the honest man he generally seems?"

"Yes. Developments may arise in which he may prove to be a great rascal and endeavor to implicate you, or at least turn out to be your enemy. Developments may occur, too, by which Miss Blye will be thrown upon the world and need a protector."

"I'll qualify for that position," Gerald said, eagerly. "Mr. Harris, I am much surprised and impressed by what you have told me, and will not forget your warning. Consider me your friend henceforth, and while I shall keep your confidence sacred, I shall by no means despise your friendship."

"You have it. Hello! who is this?"

The words fell from Dick's lips rather fiercely.

While conversing with Gerald, the eyes of Deadwood Dick had not been idle. He had been covertly watching two men in another part of the room, who had plainly been talking about himself and Gerald.

The one was the same Leon Shrimp, whom we have met before; the other was a giant—a burly six-footer, of brawny frame, slouchily attired and disgusting in his whole appearance.

Dissipation had bloated his face and eyes, and the fact that his beard was very sparse, exposed many ugly scars on his visage.

A typical bullwhacker and "bum" was he, in every sense, and it was to him that Dick referred, for he saw him leave Shrimp's company and swagger over toward where they were sitting.

"What's the matter?" Gerald asked.

"The fellow's coming over here to pick a fuss. He was

sent by that fellow over wender. By my soul, Gerald, I believe there's a job put up to get you into trouble."

"The deuce! What shall I do?"

"Nothing. Leave this galeot to me. I've met such characters before."

The Hammer came swaggering up, with his hands resting on his huge hips, and a leer upon his bloated face.

"Willst feller fanner!" he said, as he paused near the table. "Allow me ter interduce ter yer notice our respectable William Selaman or Swiltub, Hapshe. Are ye proud o' fannin' ther 'quaintance o' ther bad man from Salloway? Catch—ther 'screechin' epidemic o' ther 'fannin'? ther knock-'em still from ther tropics? Are ye right proud, I say, ter look in ther awe inspirin' presence o' sich a powerful keeracter?"

"No, I can't say that we are, and if you choose, you can tell the man who sent you, that we are not alarmed at the manners of either him or his deputy," Dick said, coolly.

"Oh! ye ain't, hey? Ye don't hev no reverence for ther old timer, Swiltub, from Scroggsville. Why, my little pair o' labor-in-the-wood. I'm a reglar old thersupbred wonder—a knock-'em still from Grave's Delight—the baddest bad man w'ot ever griped a tooth-pick!"

"No doubt you're a John Morrissey swellhead!" Dick replied. "What do you want?—what did your employer send you over here for?"

"No one didn't send me. I jest him of my own accord. I was told that this white-livered galeot war makin' faces at me, ahind my back, and I him over ter chew on his ear. I like hear, tenderfat? Hyar am I—Swiltub the crowd, fer ter receive yer position for pardon, or to mop up ther floor with yer. Now, d'ye speak up right peart an' dramatic like, afore I use ye as a doormat afore all ther assemblage!"

"I know nothing about you, sir, nor will I apologise for something I have not done!" Gerald replied, with a calmness that somewhat surprised Dick. "If that fellow, over yonder, set you on, he has done so without first informing me to whom I am indebted, and if he has any grudge against me, he can settle it by applying to me in person."

"But yer see, my gentle zephyr, he won't do nothin' of ther kind, at all. I'm ther chap w'ot's crawin' fer gore, an' I want it bad. I tell yer, it's my main livin', is gore, an'

I can't git along 'thout it. I am hyer to castigate ye, an' I'm goin' ter do it, or cast up a lung!"

"See here, you big loafer, if there's any fighting to be done, I'll answer for Mr. Gerald!" Dick interposed, springing to his feet and pushing the ruffian back as he was about to lay hands upon the Easterner. "If you want to pick a fuss with any one, pick it with me. I've helped to plant several such specimens as you, you whisky-tub."

"Oh! ye hev!" Swilltub roared, with a glare at his comparatively puny offender. "Now, d'ye jest lookee hyer, young feller, ef et warn't fer yer cheeky audacity in darin' to address me, I should be tempted ter take yer across my knee, and spank ye till ye can't sit down fer a week. Why, ther ijee of ary younker aspirin' ter stan' up afore old Swilltub, the royal striped hyena from Honduras—the snortin' smasher o' Sonora! Why cully, me chip, I'm a slugger uv ther furst degree, an' I can with ease chew, swaller an' digest a couple sich as you, without missin' my breakfast hour. Now, d'ye move aside an' let me git a chew at ther Yankee, thar, afore I make yer think ther 'arth has fersook ye."

"I am not in the moving business, but I'd advise you to move!" Dick retorted, squaring off. "If you are a slugger as you claim, slug away at me. I'm not a bad target!"

"I'll spile yer purty face!" Swilltub growled, doubling up his huge fists, until they looked like great balls of skin and bone.

In another minute, the two men had confronted each other.

A crowd at once gathered, for Swilltub was known in the Flats as a "holy terror," and it was expected that he would knock the stranger out, at one clip.

"Now, then, look out!" the giant growled, shaking out his huge arms, as if to get the kinks out of them. "Ther first act on ther programme will be to knock your teeth down your throat!"

He struck out, with a well-aimed blow, which Dick, however easily parried; then they sparred for several minutes.

As Dick had imagined, the giant was no easy adversary to vanquish, for he was gifted with great brute strength, as well as with considerable of the pugilist's science of defense and attack; but, even with these acquirements, it

directly became evident that he had before him no "tenderfoot," for Dick got in a stinger on the "orful's" neck, that staggered him.

He then followed with a left-hander between his eyes, after which his right caught Swilltub under the jaw, raising him clear off the floor, and laying him out on his back.

A wild cheer came from the crowd.

Nothing like this sort of pugilism ever had been witnessed at the Flats, and nothing was more surprising than that Swilltub, who had always reigned as supreme bully, should so easily get floored.

After his fall the giant lay for a moment, as if partly stunned, though his eyes were open, and while he lay thus Deadwood Dick bent forward and stared at him sternly.

He then turned to Gerald with a quiet laugh.

"There, my friend, I don't think his terrorship will trouble you any more. If he does, why, just serve him as I do," Dick advised.

"I am afraid that would not be for me to do," Gerald responded. "I am not much on the fight. But, come, here is the captain."

And he led Dick to one side, where a man had just paused, to look over the assemblage.

"Well, captain, how goes it?" Gerald asked. "Did you succeed in forming a party for the search?"

"Not as yet," Blye replied rather sourly. "It appears, from what I can learn, that this Black Bob is a greatly-feared scoundrel, and no one appears anxious to join in a raid against him."

"Yet here is a gentleman, captain, who has not only dared to encounter the brigand, but has dared to shoot him, and rescue our Miss Agnes. Mr. Harris this is Captain Blye."

The two men bowed, rather formally, it appearing as if neither of them were anxious to form a friendship for the other.

"Indeed! Where is my daughter, Mr. Harris?" the captain asked.

"I left her outside of town, sir, there to wait until I should be able to find you."

"Oh! I see! You want a little reward for your work?"

Elye said, with a significant sneer.

Dick flushed.

"I had not thought of such a thing, but now, since you speak of it, I don't know but I might as well take hard cash, as I would not be likely to be overloaded with gratitude from you!" was his retort.

"Name your price, sir, and conduct me to my daughter. Since you have taken the trouble to come all the way here from your stronghold to collect the ransom, you deserve it."

"Thank you for the thrust, sir, but allow me to inform you that I am in no way connected with any person in rescuing your daughter, nor with Black Bob's gang, as you hinted," Dick retorted, with flashing eyes.

"Bah! don't think I am foolish enough to believe that. It matters not, however, who or what you are. I will order my horse, and we can doubtless arrange a satisfactory price while en route."

"Very probably," Dick replied.

Elye then quitted the saloon, while Dick turned to Gerald with a faint smile.

"That's Captain Blye," he said. "He's as grateful as a primrose, and since he is so I shall make terms with him or not yet relinquish the custody of Miss Blye. Something seems to whisper to me that Blye isn't the father of the young lady, anyhow. Has it ever occurred to you?"

Gerald looked startled.

"Whatever made you imagine such a thing, sir?" he asked.

"I scarcely know—nothing more than a suspicion, perhaps."

"Ah! here comes the captain now. I wonder who that is with him?"

Dick's hand dropped to his revolver, by a force of habit, and he looked in the direction of the door.

Blye had re-entered and was accompanied by a man dressed in citizen's clothes.

As neither appeared prepared to precipitate an attack, Dick did not draw his weapon, but let his hand remain conveniently near it, for he was not yet satisfied but that Blye meant him evil.

The two men approached rather slowly.

Blye was looking sullen.

"Mr. Harris," he said, as they drew near, "I am informed by this gentleman, Deputy Marshall Farren, that it is unlawful to yield to the demands of one person who holds another person in custody for ransom. Therefore you must surrender my daughter without ransom, or submit to arrest as being an agent of Black Bob, the bandit. It is to ask which you will do that we are now here!"

"I will do neither, sir!" Dick replied coolly. "I do not propose to yield that young lady, as I do not, on more mature consideration, deem you worthy of having charge of her. As for being a member of Black Bob's gang, I deny the charge emphatically!"

"Denials will not avail you, sir!" the deputy said, pompously. "I know you and enough of your past to warrant me in arresting you. You are Deadwood Dick, and you are my prisoner!"

CHAPTER V.

Jailed.

The sensation created by the declaration of Dick's identity was great.

Many a miner present had heard of him and his deeds of daring, and at mention of his name they pressed forward to get a good look at him.

Two revolvers had the sport quickly drawn, and with a resolute expression upon his face, he placed his back to the wall and faced his enemies in defiance.

"I am not your prisoner yet!" he cried, "nor do I intend to surrender. Deadwood Dick I am, but there are no causes for my arrest in this territory at present, nor do I know of any rewards offered for my arrest, nor, may I add, do I think there is any man in the room who can take me single-handed. If you resort to consolidating forces you might effect your purpose; but, remember, I warn you off, and acting in self-defence, I cannot be held responsible for what loss of life may occur."

"If you make any resistance you'll be strung up without mercy!" Farren declared, sternly. "I am not a man to be trifled with, and you'll find I mean business every time. Will you surrender or not?"

"I will not. If you want me, why, you've got to take me! And mind, if I am attacked, Captain Blye, it will be the losing to you of the young woman, and also your death-warrant!"

"Beh! I'll take all the risks!" Blye growled.

"Because you believe that, once I am out of the way, a dangerous obstacle will be removed from your path!" Dick smiled. "Right you would be in such a case, but I am not yet out of the way. I have advised Mr. Gerald what kind of a rascal you are, and your proposed victim. Mr. Jewel, alias your own brother, is prepared for your coming. As for the Virginia City matter—"

"Seize that man—kill him!" roared the captain, growing livid with rage. "Five hundred dollars for his capture dead or alive!"

The offer seemed to be an incentive, for full half a dozen men, including the deputy, leaped toward the Sport.

Bang! bang!

Two revolvers spoke—one belonging to Deadwood Dick and the other to George Gerald—and the deputy and a miner fell, never to rise again.

The whole assemblage now sprung forward with vengeful yells, and although the two defenders fought like mad, and dropped a number of their assailants, they were finally overpowered and bound hand and foot.

"Out with 'em! Lynch 'em without parley!" was the cry that then went up; but be it said to their credit, the people of Phantom Flats were not all inhuman roughs, and a major portion of voices shouted back:

"No! no! take them to jail. They're goin' to hev a fair trial!"

And the two prisoners were borne off to the jail.

It was a newly built structure, designed for the accommodation of offenders of the law, and its massive stone walls and iron-barred windows offered little apparent possible hope of a man's making escape, without outside assistance.

When they were locked within the one main room of the prison, and left alone, with only a lone guard outside, Dick rolled over on his side and looked at young Gerald.

"You did wrong, my friend," he said. "You should have kept yourself out of trouble by letting me fight my own battles."

"Not much! You showed a friendly front to me, and you can bet I never go back on a friend."

"Well spoken! But your case was different. You are a man of unruffled reputation, and this will be apt to do your name no good, even if you are lucky enough to get off with your life!"

"However matters turn, I cannot regret standing up for you, sir. Do you expect they will try us?"

"Oh! we'll perchance get a sham hearing to-morrow, if we are here. I don't, as a usual thing, take any stock in trials, and generally lie myself away before it is time for a trial."

"Indeed! How do you manage to do this?"

"Oh! in various ways. I've been in a number of these

freeczers in my time! Sometimes I break out myself—at others I have received outside assistance."

"Such you would have to have now, if you were to make your escape."

"So it looks. But let us not despair. I have a dozen fellows not far away, who, should they hear of my capture, would contrive to get us out. If it comes to the trial, I doubt not my guiding-star will be in the ascendant, and we will not get entirely left."

"I hope so. Miss Blye may become anxious and try to reach the camp, and get lost."

Dick looked sober.

"I hope not," he said. "I trust that she will remain in the cave until I seek her. I do not want her to fall into the hands of Boston Blye, for I do not believe she is his daughter, and, then, too, I might as well tell you that he and a man named Shrimp, are the identical ones who came here to escape arrest for robbing the broker at Virginia City."

"Great Heaven! It isn't true!"

"As the gospel. I should have gobbled up the captain to-day, only that I wanted to capture his confederate too, whom I believe to be here in disguise."

"Well! well! This is all a great surprise to me."

"Undoubtedly; and, now that I come to think of it I believe the chap who set on the giant rough, is Shrimp in disguise. If such is the case, you can bet he and Blye are working against you, although Blye may appear to be friendly."

"Like enough. Shrimp, I believe, was a former suitor for the hand of Miss Blye."

"I have learned that, and that is why I believe he and Blye are confederates."

The day slowly dragged by to the two prisoners, who, despite Dick's efforts to give their situation a cheerful aspect, could but feel that there were strong chances of "border justice" in the shape of a hangman's noose.

Boston Blye and Leon Shrimp encountered one another, toward sunset, and the latter individual looked quite savage.

"See here! you've put your foot nicely into it, haven't you?" he growled.

"I don't know that I have. What is it your business anyhow, pray?"

"Don't get too sassy, or I'll show you. In the first place, by arresting that fellow so soon, you've lost the girl. I gave you credit for being a cleverer scoundrel than that."

"Hang the girl! I'll attend to finding her when I get ready."

"That don't suit me. Them tell-tale letters are getting heavy, and if matters don't come quickly to a focus there's no telling what I may do."

"What does it matter, anyhow?"

"Several years behind iron bars, to you!"

"Bah! I defy you. You have not the letters, and if you had, I can readily turn popular interest in my behalf to defend me."

"I have the papers, and you know it, and more, that I can use them against you. Only say the word and your brother, here known as Old Jewel, shall not only have these papers, but also—"

"Hush! Curse you, say no more. All is working well. The girl will be in our possession inside of two days."

"But how 'bout the Yorker? You've cooked his goose, so far as workin' him is concerned. If the outlaw swings, so will the Yorker."

"I'll try to secure his release. You keep mum concerning Old Jewel. I'm off to see him at first opportunity."

"Well, I'll keep my valve shot as long as possible; but ef ye'r' too tardy, thar's no tellin' what may happen."

The two men separated, Blye going to the hotel, in the office of which a man approached him.

"Sh! Not a word, till we are in private," this rough-looking individual cautioned. "I've been watching for a chance to see you, but have failed until now. Take me to your room."

The captain eyed the fellow a moment, and then obeyed, evidently resolved to see what he had to say.

Once in the speculator's room, he said:

"Be brief now with what you have to say, for I have no time to waste."

"Correct, yer honor. Do you know me?"

"No. Never met you before."

"Thought not. I am familiarly known as Coyote, and

am the right bower of Black Bob, the bandit. It was I who captured your daughter and her companion."

"You infernal rascal! How dare you come here and tell me that. I just jailed one man for telling me that he had rescued my daughter."

"But you'll not jail me. We will cook our terms right here, and if you attempt to come it crooked over me, I'll put a knife through your liver. This feller, Deadwood Dick, told you he had the girl, did he?"

"Yes, and I believe him."

"Well, in one sense, he didn't lie. He did have her for awhile—nigh about killed Black Bob, rescued the gal, and left her in a cave, while I slid along and rescued her, and transported her to a safer place. Ther she am now, an' I am hyer to make terms for transfer ter you. This aint my own deal at present, an' et's a durned shame ef I don't take the trick w'et's profitable."

"You are lying to me. You haven't the girl at all," the captain growled. "You have heard of Deadwood Dick having possession of her, and formed this plan to extort money from me. Begone, sir! I'll have nothing whatever to do with you."

"Oh, yes, you will, I know," Coyote declared, and two revolvers arose above the table-top in his steady grasp. "I'm here for business, not for play, capt'in, and 'tho' don't go no further for an answer with me than a pint of bug-juice would with a Colorado cowboy. D'ye want the girl or not?"

"When I do, I'll undertake to find her, without any desperado assistance, I assure you."

"Very well. I'll keep her safely until you want her, charging storage from date. At present my needs can be supplied by ten thousand dollars."

"You are mad, man."

"Oh, no; but heavens help you ef I git riled. I'm worse then sixty thousan' hornets on a jamboree. Ten thousan. I want now, an' want 'er bad, an' ef I don't see 'er forth-comin' inside o' two minnits, I'll see how close I can come ter hittin' the pupil of yer left eye. Mind, thar'll be no postponin' uv ther show, rain or shine!"

The captain was livid and pale with rage by turns.

That he was in a bad fix, Captain Boston Biye was not slow to comprehend.

"You've got me foul!" he said, "and I'm no fool to resist, where pistols are trumps. But as your demand is for above the capacity of my purse, you'll have to lower your notes to the key of V, that being the entire amount of my earthly possessions."

"Five thousand dollars?"

"Yes."

"Well, fork 'er over. That's better than none, I allow."

"When I see my daughter, you see your cash."

"Oh, no! I'm not takin' any risks, you bet. When I get the twaddlededum, I skips out, an' byme-bye you sees yer gal sailin' inter camp, axin' fer yer."

"Do you think I'd trust you?"

"I don't think nothin' 'bout it. I know ef ye don't come ter my terms, I'll salivate ye in yer noddle, quicker'n greased lightnin'!"

Blye took a roll of bills from his pocket and counted them slowly, a look of desperation upon his face.

There was an even five thousand, and it was the last ready cash he had in the world.

He flung the pile at Coyote with an angry snarl.

"Take the money and Begone, curse you!" he cried.

"You have robbed me of my last cent, and I am a pauper Begone, I say!"

"Heerect, boss; jest as ye say. I'll send the gal ter once. Men like you don't keep down in the gutter long at a time, and when you get heeled again, I'll call around for the other five thousand."

And with a mocking laugh he left the room.

Berton Blye sat for some moments in deep meditation, his face wearing an ugly expression.

"There is but one thing to do. I must see my delectable brother and extort money from him, as it has been extorted from me. Without money I'll be in deeper trouble than I have yet seen, so I must visit Jewel."

CHAPTER VI.

A Baffled Villian.

"Fire! fire! fire!"

Long rung this cry, at about dusk, that night when everybody and everybody's neighbor was either abroad on the street, or perhaps, wasting their time and money at the big gaming-saloon.

But when the cry rung out, all habitations or resorts poured forth their humanity into the street, making the populace one excited mass.

A fire in a mining-town like Phantom Flats was something of a novelty in its way; then, too, the average buildings of a camp are dry as tinder, if of any age, and once a fire gets started it is liable to do a great deal of damage before it can be checked.

To-night a still mountain breeze was blowing down the gulch, and the fire being at the upper end of the town, it looked as if a serious conflagration might ensue.

As soon as the location was settled, a great rush was made up the street, many carrying buckets of water, so that in a few minutes the business portion of the camp was entirely deserted.

Thus it was that the jail where Deadwood Dick and George Gerald were confined, and which was located at the lower edge of the camp, was left unguarded, except one old man, who was too infirm to run to the "sarcus."

When matters had assumed this shape, a dozen figures, black-clad and masked, stealthily approached the jail.

Every man was armed, and had Deadwood Dick seen their approach, he would have known that they were his dozen of dumb defenders, and he would have felt a thrill of excitement.

But he knew not who, a few minutes later, began a fierce attack upon the heavy doors, without uttering a sound of the human voice.

"Hello! what is the matter?" Gerald asked, starting up, out of a daze. "Who's attacking the door?"

"Regulators, I reckon," Dick returned. "There was a

cry of fire a bit ago, and the people rushed to it, and now come these fellows to break into the jail. It looks decidedly to me as if the fire was a put-up job to give a party of roughs under Boston Blye a chance to take us out and lynch us!"

"Heaven help us if that be true!"

An intense silence then ensued. The battering upon the door continued with unabated violence and the stout barrier finally began to weaken—so much that the prisoners momentarily expected it to burst open.

They had not long to wait. There was a sharp crash, and the barrier fell inward, while the assailants leaped over the threshold.

Deadwood Dick uttered a glad cry, as he recognized his Dumb Dozen!

"They are my men, Gerald," he said. "We are once more free!"

Their feet were released in a twinkling; then they were hurried from the jail, and out of the camp, long ere their escape was discovered.

Captain Boston Blye left Phantom Flats about sunset, on his visit to his deeply wronged brother, whom we will continue to call Old Jewel, the hermit—for he had long ago renounced his former name, partly as a safeguard against arrest and partly because he hated it.

Not knowing the exact location of the hermit's abode, Blye had secured the services of a miner as guide. And, well mounted, they were not long in making the journey, arriving at the lone cabin about an hour after dark.

Dismounting a short distance from the lodge of the hermit, Blye left his horse in charge of his guide, and approached the hut, where, somewhat to his surprise, he found old Jewel seated upon a camp-stool in the doorway.

The hermit made no motion to rise or welcome his visitor, and so Boston paused at a few paces from him.

"Good evening, Mr. Jewel!" he said, doffing his hat. "I am lucky to find you so easily. I suppose you do not recognize me?"

"On the contrary, I do," was the cold response. "Your coming is not at all unknown or unexpected."

Blye looked incredulous.

"Who am I, then?" he demanded.

"A wretch—a villain—a traitor; Heaven knows how much more!" was the stinging retort.

"Yet I am your estimable brother," Blye sneered, with a chuckle. "One can hardly go back on their own relations."

"Can't they? Why did you do so, years ago, when your devilish schemes branded me a criminal and outcast, and forced me to leave my home?"

"Oh, you know I never harmed you, brother—I could not do that. Your own villainy got you into trouble, and you have me to thank that you were ever able to escape the vengeance of the law."

"Liar! coward! devil in man's form! Away with you—I will not have you further perjure your soul. Why do you come here? I am no brother of yours. Begone, ere I set my defenders upon you!"

"Keep on believing that!" Jewel retorted with decision. "There is at least one man who will not go back on me whom all the men of Phantom and all the imps of Satan cannot cope with. Friends? Yes, I have them yet, but not of my kith and kin!"

"Bah! what care I? Neither do I fear, no matter what bold outlaw you may have for an ally or friend. I have come here to see you as a brother and a friend, and as such I expect to be treated."

Defenders and Blye laughed evilly.

"That is a big word for you to use. Who would defend you, pray? Why, there's not a person in Phantom Flats but what is down on you."

"Then your expectations are destined to sustain a severe shock, sir. In flesh you may be a brother of mine, but there the relationship ends. Friends we can never be, and so there is no use of prolonging this interview."

"Ha! ha! How anxious you are to get rid of me! My gentle brother, are you not aware that you are addressing one who can make you more real trouble than you have yet experienced?"

"I well know you have come here to annoy and threaten me, and for the sole purpose of extorting money from me. I also know that you have a lying document, with which you think to torture me, and which you forced me to sign."

"Exactly. Ha! ha! You are an excellent guesser. Yes, brother, I have you emphatically in my power, and since you have received me so indifferently, I propose to twist you without mercy. You have money; I have none. Being my brother, it is certainly your duty to divide with me. You will refuse, but I know a twist of the thumb-screws will make you shall out liberally and cheerfully."

"We shall see. Do your worst. I'll never yield to you a point, you villain!"

"Not when I expose you to the authorities, and you see a gallows in the future?"

"No! a thousand times no! I defy you. An ~~captain~~ you have made me, and I defy the law also. I now have men to defend me, who are not afraid of an army. If you think you have me so far in your power, go on with your vile schemes. I'll quickly show you where the advantage lies!"

"Eah! Your chief dependence is the hunted outlaw, Deadwood Dick; but I have the pleasant task of informing you that the lion Richard now languishes in the jail at Phantom Flats, so there's nothing that remains but for you to come to my terms. I want money, and you have plenty of it. Reports say you are better fixed even than a millionaire. Give me one hundred thousand dollars, spot cash, and I will not only deliver up to you the tell-tale confession, but will put you in possession of something which will forever after gladden your life!"

"You cannot approach me in that manner. If I am broken down and white-haired, Boston Elye, I am yet wise enough to shun any trap your cunning brain can lay. Happiness for me is out of the question; I buried that thing years ago."

"...You are mistaken. Listen to me. When you left Boston you deemed that there was no one in all the world who could be dear to you?"

"True; there was not one who cared for me!"

"You believed my lie that your wife was faithless to you?"

"Had I not sufficient evidence?"

"No; it was all but a part of my scheme to ruin you. A truer wife never lived than Celia Elye was to you."

"Man! dare you stand there and tell me of your foul work? I will kill you!"

"Ch, no you won't!" and the captain quickly drew his

revolver and cocked it. "When it comes down to killing, I am at home. Yes, I broke up your home the same way I broke you up. Your wife was never divorced from you. That night, when you saw Bill Roberts, I sent him there in order to bring about the result."

"Murder!" was all the hermit could gasp.

"Oh, certainly!" Blye assented, with a laugh. "As I was saying, your wife was never divorced. Shortly after your flight I conveyed her to a lonely spot on Long Island, under pretence of taking her to you. I there tried to force her to promise me her hand in marriage, but she scornfully refused, and in my frenzy at her taunts I stabbed her through the heart and fled, taking your child, Agnes with me."

Old Jewel did not answer, for his gaze was fixed upon his villainous brother in an awful glare.

"I lay in hiding a few months, and then, hearing no sensation about the matter, and finding that no trace of a murder had been made public, I quickly closed up business in Boston and fled West. The child is still with me—now a beautiful, refined young lady—and all that it costs to get her is one hundred thousand dollars, and I'll throw in the confession."

"You haven't got the child!"

"I have. She is where I can get her in a half day."

"Then go and get her, hand both her and the confession over to me, and the money is yours."

Blye burst into a loud laugh.

"Well, you're liberal, ain't you?" he sneered. "Why, man, I wouldn't take less than half a million for the girl! I have merely been drawing you on, to see if there was anything human about you. Half a million, and no less, will secure the confession and the girl!"

"You are mad, man. As much as I could desire possession of either, or both, I could never think of sacrificing you by yielding to your terms. Leave me, Boston Blye, and never let me see your face again."

"Well I leave you, though?" the schemer sneered.

"Well, I rather fancy not. You are too rich a bargain to discard. You say you will not come to my terms, but I know you will. You see this revolver! Well, I'll give you just five counts to swear that you will pay me my price within five minutes. Refuse, and you know me well

enough to believe that I'll not hesitate to put a bullet through your heart. Remember, now, I'm in dead earnest. One!"

Up came the revolver to a level with the hermit's heart; and the diabolical expression upon Blye's face spoke better than words of his fiendish determination.

If it were possible, the pallor increased upon Jewel's face, and a frightened expression crept from his eyes. He did not speak—his tongue seemed palsied, while a nervous tremor shook his frame.

"Two!" Boston Blye cried, sternly and un pityingly. "Speak up! It is your last chance!"

Jewel made no answer, but an appealing expression came over his visage, an unspoken prayer for mercy, as it were.

A faint chuckle of triumph escaped Blye. He pulled back the hammer of his weapon, the click sounding like the knell of doom to the sad hermit.

Still he spoke not.

"Three!" called out the captain.

"Stop!" a voice cried sharply, and at the same time a pistol was pressed against the side of his head. "If there is to be any murdering done here, allow me to take a hand in it."

Blye wheeled and dropped his pistol, with a startled oath, to behold the postmistress of Phantom Flats, who rejoiced in the cognomen of Poker Kate.

She was, as usual, richly attired, and wore the veil over her face, so her features were cleverly disguised.

The gleaming weapon in her hand showed that she was in nowise loth to lend a helping hand to the weak and defenseless.

"What the devil do you mean?" Blye growled savagely. "Is this your business, you hussy?"

"Precisely, you foul-mouthed scoundrel. I don't allow such vipers as you to abuse old men like Jewel!" was the stinging retort. "You are a detestable wretch, Boston Blye, as I well know by hearing your conversation with the hermit here, and none too good to hang, and hang you will, or I miss my guess."

"You lie, curse you!"

"Do I? Well, I rather fancy not. Now, then, face about and strike for the Flats at a two-forty gait before I blow the head off from you. When you reach the Flats, do you

buy yourself a horse, or steal one—which latter would be the most natural to you—and vamoose for parts unknown. If I see a button of you when I get back to the camp, I'll drop you as I would a coyote. D'ye hear? Git!"

"Furies seize you!" the captain gritted. "I'll get even with you."

"You'll never live to get the opportunity, unless you trot out lively, before I count ten. One! two! three!"

Blye waited to hear no more.

He was satisfied that Poker Kate meant business, and that the best thing for him was to get back as far as Phantom Flats anyhow.

So he turned and stalked away toward Phantom Flats.

Without a word to the hermit, Poker Kate followed in the villain's wake, keeping her weepen in readiness for an emergency.

She evidently meant that Blye should not get another chance to molest the hermit, that night, at least.

Being a walker, Blye soon distanced the postmistress; in fact, he was not aware that she was following him; but, halfway between the hermitage and the Flats, he suddenly became conscious that for the second time that evening a pistol muzzle was pressed to his temple, while a gruff voice cried out:

"Whoa up that, Boss Blye! Hope ye ain't goin' ter slight me, while yer out wisitin'. Kinder strikes me that ain't fair. Jest come up this hyer fissure. Thar's a little hoel hyer, which constertutes my new headquarters. No hesitatin' now, ef ye don't wanten git slugged wi' a chunk o' lead."

"Who are you? What d'ye want?" Blye demanded savagely. "I don't know you; you're mistaken in the person."

"Not ef ther jury aire any jedge!" the other retorted, seizing the schemer by the arm.

"Ef you don't know me, I happen to know you, my dear; so waltz right along without a whimper. I've somethin' ter tell ye that will interest you, and I don't mean you no harm unless you git peevish and balky—then I'll scatter your brains to the four winds of the earth. Will you come?"

"Yes, I suppose so," Blye reluctantly assented.

"Then get in before me, Satan, and march!" the brigand

ordered, for we may as well add right here that Boston Blye's captor was none other than Black Bob, the outlaw, who had captured Miss Agnes.

He faced the schemer about, and they entered the ravine, which was narrow, deep, and dark as Egypt.

The footway was extremely rough and uneven, and one would scarcely have looked for a human abode. But the ravine soon ended at the mouth of a shallow little cave, near the opening of which a fire of pine-cones was burning.

A couple of logs lay near the fire, and bidding Blye be seated on one, the brigand occupied the other.

"Now, then," he said, "we are ready for business. Take a good look at me, Boston, and see if you don't remember me."

"No, I don't," Blye declared, irritably. "I see in you nothing but a common ruffian."

"Thank you for your flattery. I am not a common ruffian, however, as I am chief in the Order of Rogues. I was lurking about the hermitage to-night and saw and heard all that took place."

"Well?"

"Well, I saw that Poker Kate rather baffled you, and, thinks I, Blye is in hard luck, and maybe I can help him out! See?"

"Go on."

"Well, I dropped in here ahead of you, and here we are, after a long separation, with nothin' to hinder our joining issues and making an alliance. What d'ye say, Boston—shall it be so or not?"

"I don't understand you. Who art you—what do you know?"

"I am Bill Roberts, once upon a time your go-between in the matter of separating a man and wife."

"The devil you say! I thought you dead long ago."

"Then you thought wrong. I'm Bill Roberts, alias Black Bob. The aspirant for your charming niece's hand, who holds you to some extent in his power, is my son."

"What! Leon Shrimp?"

"The same! Now, then, to business. All can be told in a jiffy. In Phantom Flats, somewhere, is a lost mine of immense wealth. There is, I believe, but one person who knows of its whereabouts, although there are twelve dumb

men ever searching for it. Deadwood Dick is the captain of these men, and the defender of Old Jewel, whose heir he expects to become. He intends to drive you to the dogs and as soon as he finds I am alive, he will wage war. He will yet ingratiate himself into the favor of the people until he gets enough, additions to his Dozen to run the town and hold the secret mine. See?"

"Yes; but it must not be so."

"Of course not. We must stop it. Let five of us form a league, and work to the one end of ending the career of Deadwood Dick, securing Jewel's wealth, and capturing the secret mine, all to share equally in the profits!"

CHAPTER VII.

A Heinous Scheme—The Fair Fakir.

A few nights later, four men met in a lonely spot outside Phantom Flats, and stood facing each other, with grim expression of countenance.

There were Boston Blye, Leon Shrimp, Black Bob, and the ludicrous giant, old Swilltub. The appearance of each pointed to the fact that they were there upon a mission of importance, as all were well armed, and the eyes of three were leveled inquiringly upon the fourth, who was none other than the mountain brigand, whom Deadwood Dick supposed he had killed.

After a short silence, Black Bob spoke:

"Well, my pards, I see that all are here except one, and that one I have just learned, has succeeded to the captaincy of my old band, so it will be out of the question to think of taking him into our schemes; but four of us are all that are needed, so let us proceed."

"One little matter needs explanation, beyond what we so far know," Captain Blye interposed.

"What is it, sir?"

"At a previous meeting, you stated to me that you were sure that but one person in Phantom Flats knew the location of the Dumb Dozen's lost mine. Who is that person?"

"I know not; I have only a strong suspicion!"

"Out with it, then. I thought there was to be no secrets between us."

"Neither is there. I believe that Poker Kate knows of the existence of the mine, and is secretly working it. You notice that at her gambling saloon—for I presume you all conclude that she is the backer of it—there is always a gang of fellows hanging about, who neither work, play, nor drink. Whenever she passes them they bow low with respect. It stands to reason that they are in her service, and for whatever purpose could it be except as miners? For two days past I have been sizing up, and feeding with money, such characters as I thought I could depend on. And a liberal posting of copies of these papers will fetch many citizens and roughs over to my side."

As he spoke, he unfolded the two sheets of paper, and held them up for inspection. Each contained an important message, in pen print, and each message had its bearing upon the other.

The one ran as follows:—

“PROCLAMATION.

“To the People of Phantom Flats:

“Be it known that I, Deadwood Dick, who have been branded an outlaw, and publicly dishonored by being incarcerated in jail, when there was no just cause for such treatment, have this day sworn to be revenged upon my oppressors. Warning is hereby given to all citizens that I shall begin my revenge at once, by making funerals for such of them as have turned against me. The first day one shall die, the second day, two, and so forth in proportion as the days pass by. No use will there be of trying to capture me, as I am amply protected by Deadwood Dick's Dozen. Defiance, hatred and destruction to my enemies shall henceforth be my motto.

“(Signed)

Deadwood Dick.”

The other was evidently intended as an answer to the first, and ran thus:

“NOTICE TO THE PEOPLE.

“The infamous outlaw and criminal, Deadwood Dick, having declared his defiance to all law and order, therefore be it—

“Resolved, That some prompt measure be adopted, whereby this dangerous character be summarily put out of the way. Therefore, several prominent citizens have organized themselves into a league, the object of which is to secure the annihilation of Deadwood Dick, and of all characters of his class, and to bring order out of chaos for the benefit of the people of Phantom Flats. Only persons of known good repute and reliability will be admitted to the league.

“William Roberts, Captain.”

Black Bob read both proclamations aloud.

“But what does this mean? Did Deadwood Dick issue the notice bearing his signature?” Blye asked.

“Of course not. I did it myself. If objectionable people of Phantom Flats turn up their toes in the order named,

it is plain to see that Dick will get the credit for the act while we shall be constantly gaining in power."

"But who is to do this wholesale slaughtering? I'll have nothing to do with murdering."

"Nor I!" chimed in Shrimp.

"You're a precious pair of rascals, I'll swear, and blood-spilling won't be a novelty to either of you! But then I'll manage that. Here's old Swilltub, who has taken the contract of makin' stuns at five dollars per head and his drinks."

"Nary a time!" the giant growled. "It's ten dollars or nothin'."

"Ten dollars it shall be, then," Elye said. "You've got to do your work secretly and sure, however."

"You bet I'll be heedful!" was the reply. "Ef ye wull only start an undertakin' establishment, I'll furnish ye ther stuns, an' make it profitable fer ye."

The four rascals separated, and took different courses back to Phantom Flats.

The next day the notice purporting to be Deadwood Dick's manifesto was found posted in a prominent place, and was read and re-read by the excited populace, and many were the anathemas heaped upon the head of the terrible Dick.

Men who seldom manifested any spirit of revenge were loud in their denunciation of the Daring Sport.

When the excitement was fairly ablaze the proclamation of Roberts was posted, and as no one knew him as being Black Bob, he at once became extremely popular, and his plan was received with much approval.

All day long the schemers were working out the connecting links of their mercenary plot, Black Bob being the leading spirit to whom the others looked for orders. He had plenty of money, and it was used without stint in converting strictly reliable rangers to the interest of his diabolical scheme, and by the latter part of the day he had a force of backers that must have made even Deadwood Dick hesitate in confronting them.

During the day a hard-fisted old miner, named Tompkins, was found murdered at the outskirts of the town, and robbed of his personal effects.

The blow that had killed him had been inflicted by a

club or some other blunt instrument, which had crushed in his skull.

This only served to increase the excitement, and to add to Black Bob's list of recruits.

Late in the afternoon the stage arrived, and brought with it, as usual, a load of strangers, most of whom were miners.

There was one, however, who evidently came not to Phantom Flats to toil with pick and shovel—a lady clad in deepest black and closely veiled, and yet apparently young and passably pretty.

With her came a large number of trunks, satchels and bundles, which were transported to the hotel, whither the lady at once repaired, and engaged accommodations.

Upon the register she indited her name and business with a few artistic strokes of the pen:

“NEVADA NELL,
Agent for Doctor Delano's Magic Oil,
Free Concerts in Front of Hotel,
Afternoon and Evenings!”

She hired the best room in the hotel, and paid for her accommodations a week in advance, after which she was not seen until about dusk.

In the meantime her agent, a dapper little individual, had circulated handbills freely about, announcing an open-air concert at eight. A rough platform of boards on several dry goods boxes served for a stage. This was erected opposite the great gambling saloon which many believed to belong to Poker Kate.

About dusk the Female Fakir (as she was called) made her appearance upon the stand, and her coming was the signal for the gathering of a crowd.

In apparel her appearance had undergone a great change, although her face was still closely veiled.

Her costume was that of a boy, and was composed of pink and blue satin of neat fit. Small patent leather slippers and silk-woven stockings adorned her lower extremities; a lavish display of jewelry and diamonds, and a jaunty snow-white sombrero upon her head completed her outfit, unless we mention the revolvers in her belt.

Her appearance was dashing, to say the least, and the crowd that surged around her stand were alive with curiosity.

She gave a sweeping glance over the crowd through her veil, and then began arranging her furniture and stock in trade, which consisted of a small stand filled with small bottles, and a couple of chairs.

When everything was fixed apparently to her liking she advanced closer to the edge of the platform and spoke:

"Fellow-citizens, gentle guzzlers, and glorious galoots! Behold standing before you the greatest doctress and wonder-worker in the world! I am Nevada Nell, I want ye to know, and I take the whole bakery, let alone the cake, in the matter of curing diseases and ailments of a complicated nature. I am a wizard and a seer; by the aid of Dr. Delano's Magic Oil, and the mystic power I possess, I can positively cure any disease instantly, with which the human race is afflicted. Show me a man I cannot relieve and I will give the doctor a hundred dollars for each case I fail to fetch to time. Ah! a man with a stiff arm. That's the checker!"

A middle-aged man was pushed forward and ascended the platform. His left and right hand were terribly drawn and distorted by rheumatism so that they were of no use to him.

"Are you able to cure me?" he asked, with something like a sneer. "Ef ye be, I'll give you fifty dollars, spot cash. Thar's a heap o' doctors as hev tried me, but all agreed I war a case."

"Judging by the blossoms on your nose, you must be a copper distillery vat!" Nevada Nell retorted. "Nevertheless, I fancy I can cure you quicker than the jerk of a lamb's tail. Take a seat on that chair."

The cripple obeyed.

Nevada Nell then so adjusted her veil that the lower part of her face was covered while the eyes and forehead were exposed to view.

She then advanced toward the patient with a peculiar, stealthy tread, her eyes fixedly resting upon his, until his gaze responded to hers, when a slight shudder thrilled his frame.

She waved her hand a couple of times above his head, then turned to the audience and smiled:

"Now, gentle galoots, you perceive the miracle I have accomplished. A moment ago this man could not

straighten out his arms; now he can do it without the least trouble. Blossom-nose, you will oblige by exercising your bread-wielders!"

She made a sudden quick motion at him and, as if by magic, a violent shiver or quaking came over the man and he could use his arm and hands as freely as any person in the crowd.

He arose with an exultant yell, and struck out into air right and left in true pugilistic style, to illustrate that he was cured.

A merry twinkle came into Nevada Nell's eyes as she noted the pilgrim's huge satisfaction.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" he yelled, dancing about the platform. "I'm cured of the cursed critter an' 'tain't cost me a cent. Walk up, gents, an' git cured fer nothin' like old Sam Barkis jest now has done!"

"You forget!" Nevada Nell said, tapping him on the shoulder. "You promised to give me fifty dollars if I cured you, did you not?"

"Git out, you silly gal! D'ye s'pose I am sich a fool? Bet yer life I never let a woman get the best of me!"

"Then, if you're that sort of a rooster, maybe your arms better get stiff again," Nell remarked, with a wave of her hand.

Instantly his hands closed shut, his arms drew up in their old rigid state, while a moan of pain was wrung from his lips at the shock of the change.

"Stop! Let up! for heaven's sake don't!" he yelled in terror. "Take me out of this fix, ma'am! Please do! I'll pay you like a little man if you do! I sw'ar to that—'deed and God knows I will!"

"Fork over your cash, then, my man. Cash talks with me every day in a week, you bet! Just roll out your ducats and I'll fetch your arms out o' tangle."

"I hain't got it to-night, but will have it to-morrow, ma'am."

"That settles it. My golden rule is positively no trust to any one."

"See hy'er, gal, you're too flip altogether," a coarse, blatant voice cried out, and old Swilltub the giant came forward. "I'll jest bet ye a cool hundred dollars against a cent that ye can't do what ye claim—limber up that feller's arms again."

"Taken! Put up or shut up!" Nevada Nell cried, drawing a cent from her pocket. "I am always taking such snaps as that."

The overgrown bullwhacker fished out two fifty dollar bills and placed them in the hands of a bystander, in whose hands Nevada Nell also placed the cent.

"Now, then, go ahead," the bullwhacker ordered. "If ye win my money I'll give ye another test. I know yer scoop, daisy—you're a mesmerist."

A faint chuckle escaped Nevada Nell's lips; then she bent her piercing gaze upon old Swilltub, and for several minutes seemed to hold him rigidly spellbound.

"Lie down!" she commanded sternly a moment later.

There was no reply from the giant.

"Lie down!" she repeated.

He shuddered slightly, and obeyed, stretching himself out at full length.

The roar of laughter that escaped the crowd seemed to pass his hearing, for he made no show of resentment.

"You perceive, gents, that even a giant in size sometimes has to succumb to the power of the mind!" the fair Fakir said triumphantly. "Stand on your head, sir!"

CHAPTER VIII.

The Fakir at Work.

A snort of disgust escaped the giant, and he shook his head in defiance to Nevada Nell's order.

"Obey me!" she cried, sternly. "Stand on your head, now."

"No, I'll be gol darned ef I do!" Swilltab cried. "Ye ain't so smart as ye thort, me gall! I'm up to yer little neck, an' ye can't make no laughing stock out of me, by a long shot."

A gliter came into Nevada Nell's eyes, and the forefinger of her right hand pointed at him threateningly.

"Will you obey me?" she cried again.

He stared at her vacantly for a moment; then another shudder seemed to creep over him, and a sort of gasp escaped his lips.

"Yes! yes! let up! I'll do jest as ye say, my party!" he whined.

And the overgrown bullwhacker did get down upon his hands and knees, and then stand upon his head, supporting himself by the strength of his huge arms.

"There! Nothing is better than to have little children laugh when they are young, gentle," Nevada Nell said, with a cynical laugh. "Children that are brought up to obey are always shining marks in society—that is, honest children. I will now leave my pupil to his own amusements for a few minutes, while I sell you some of my famous 'Swilltab Oil.' And, stranger, just pass me over the sum of my dollar with Mr. Swilltab. There, that's right—thank you. Now, then, who wants a bottle of the oil? It is a truly infallible for the majority of complaints, and will cure at any time. It will limber up stiffened joints, it will cure rheumatism, consumption, enlargement of the gall, fevers, cramps, and a thousand and one other ailments which the human flesh is heir to. All it costs is five dollars a bottle, and I throw money in, and something else, too."

The Fakir's valet then stepped forward and handed her

a half-peck measure filled with gold pieces, watches, gold rings, and so forth, which she held in such a way as to be seen, and there were no few expressions of "Oh!" and "Ah!"

The valet then handed her a package of strong envelopes, and taking one, she opened it wide; then turned to the crowd.

"Now, then, I am first going to place you a bottle of Doctor Delano's Magic Oil in this package," she said, "and I want you all to watch me close, to see that there is no cheating. Next I take a five dollar gold piece and toss it up, thusly, into the air, and presto! you hear and see it fall into the envelope. Next comes a gold watch and chain, six more five dollars in gold, and a superb diamond ring—all dropped into the envelope, you see.

Now, then, how much will you give me for the lot—how much cash do I hear for the humbug you have all seen? Of course it's a genuine humbug. You don't suppose I'd go to work and throw away cash like that all for nothing. You bet your life I'm a cheat, and yet I do it right in front of your eyes, and I'll wager there's not a man in the crowd who will not swear he saw the coins, watch and ring go into the envelope, which I will now proceed to seal—and now, how much do I hear for it? Who has got liberality enough in his heart to offer me a hundred dollars for the lot, or fifty, or forty, thirty or twenty-five?"

"Oh-darn it, I'll give you twenty-five for the lot," one man cried.

"I'll raise it to thirty," came from a second.

"Good! Sold at thirty dollars, clean cash. Here you go, pardner. Now I'll fill up another package and want you to watch out sharp that I don't cheat you, for I am up to such tricks every day in the week. Without such people as I this honest world could never get along."

With nimble fingers she fixed up another package in the same manner, apparently as she had the first.

"Who wants another dose of Doctor Delano's Magic Oil, trimmings and et ceteras throwed in? Who wants it, I say?"

The stranger who had purchased the first dose had made an examination of the contents of the envelope and found everything as Nevada Nell had represented, and

at once became loud in his claim that it was a "clean out-an'-out square racket."

Consequently Nevada Nell had disposed of some thirty or forty of the packages before the discovery was made that instead of being gold, the coins were old coppers polished up, and the gold watches were but "pinch-back," and thinly galvanized at that.

A howl of chagrin and disgust then carried the crowd by storm, and the Female Fakir was the target for many an evil glance.

"See hyer! I'll sw'ar this ain't no fair deal, and I kick," one of the victims cried. "I want my money back, I do!"

"You bet we do," joined in another. "Ther critter is a cheat and a fraud, an' ef she don't pony over our shekels, she gets ther bounce, you bet."

"Gents, you know not to whom you are talking," Nevada Nell responded. "I warned you if your eyes were not quicker than my fingers, I'd cheat you. So you have only yourselves to blame. Besides, I want you to understand one important thing. I can prevent you from doing me injury. I can force the best of you to obey my will."

"Cit out! ye can't do nothin' o' the sort," Dandy Dan, from Red Trail roared. "'Ca'se yer made Swilltub stand on his head 'tain't sayin' everybody's a fool. Yet better stan' Swilltub on his feet or ther blood will rush to his head."

"That's so—I'd nearly forgotten him," Nevada Nell chuckled, with a glance toward the giant, who still remained rigidly in the strange position she had transfixed him. "Hello! Swilltub, how do you like it in your reversed perpendicularity?"

"Bully Isaac!" the bullwhacker granted, without the least show of hesitation. "In fact, I rather like the change."

"You see what power over mind will do," Nevada Nell smiled, turning to the rough and grizzled audience. "That poor fellow is wholly under my control and will do whatever I say, no matter its nature."

"Well, ye can't do nuthin' to me, you bet!" Dandy Dan snorted, in supreme disgust. "Swilltub must have a weak spot in his big pate to let a gal triumph over him that way."

"D'ye really think so, my friend? Well, now, you might possibly be mistaken. Supposing you get down on all fours and see if you can't bark like a dog. I fancy you would make a real tart-looking terrier."

All eyes were riveted upon Dandy Dan's countenance to behold a tremor pass over it, followed by a ghostly sort of expression.

An instant later he uttered a dog-like growl, dropped on all-fours, and began to bark furiously, and as naturally as a good-sized canine could have done.

Some of the crowd laughed, and others looked serious, while not a few took care to get off at a safe distance, so great was their distrust of the remarkable woman.

"Now then, Swilltub, you can turn right side up with care," she said, whereupon the giant did so, with alacrity.

"Great howlin' garter snakes!" he roared. "It's Dandy Dan as hes got the trimmings, for sure! What ye barkin' at, ye galeot? Whar'd ye get ther rams?"

"At a big tom-cat, which gouged me in the eye, bow-wow!" the ruffian growled.

"Meow! meow!" screeched the giant also dropping on all-fours, and humping up his back like a cat. "Meow! I'll chaw your eyes out, you snoozer!"

"Bow-wow! bow-wow! I'll chaw off your ears!" Dandy growled—then the two made for each other, as if their lives depended upon the spur of the moment.

They met and clinched, and rolled over upon the ground, fighting and clawing like mad.

"See here!" Boston Elye interposed, authoritatively, as he pushed forward. "There shall be no witchery going on when I am about. Young woman, I command you to unmesmerize these parties, at once, under penalty of death!"

"You do, eh?" Nevada Nell retorted. "Maybe you'd like to be mesmerized yourself?"

"You may be smart, but not sufficiently so to mesmerize me. Again, I order you to release these fools from the spell you have put upon them. Disobey me, if you dare!"

There was an underlying meaning to the captain's speech, and Nevada Nell saw by the fierceness of the major part of the visages before her, that her little game was likely to bring her into trouble, did she proceed further with it.

Accordingly she said:

"Very well, Mr. Blye; it shall be as you say. Look! these fellows are no longer dogs and cats!"

She gave a wave of her hand, and released Swilltub and Dandy Dan from their mesmeric subordination; then said a few words in an undertone to her valet, after which she once more turned to Boston Blye.

"There! does that satisfy you, sir? If so, I am highly elated," with evident sarcasm in tone and manner.

"So far as it goes!" Blye cried, angrily. "That does not settle the matter, however. You will be kind enough to return to the victims, the money you swindled them out of."

"I will do nothing of the kind, sir. If you think to bulldoze Nevada Nell, you'll find you've got the wrong pig by the ear. I can stand some things but not everything. They were warned that I would cheat them before their eyes, and need not complain. If you think to scare me, you'll miss it, as I am game as they make 'em, and can put a bullet right home, beautifully," and the next instant she held her pair of revolvers leveled toward the crowd.

"Put up those weapons, or it will be the worse for you!" Blye commanded, hardly knowing what course to take. "We don't allow any outlaw proceedings in this camp."

"I am glad to hear it, and shall be sorry to have you force me to drop a dozen or so of you. I came here to mind my own business, and if I am allowed to do so, no harm will come to you. If not, there will be some warm old times in Phantom Flats."

"What are you going to do here? We want no magicians or agents of the devil in the camp!" Blye growled, noting that her speech had created a favorable impression.

"I am going to sell Magic Oil, cure deformities, play cards, tell fortunes, and make money as squarely as any other person, sir. If any one steps on my toes, I will return the compliment. If I am let alone, I shall harm no one. There you have it. Put it in your pipe and smoke it, one and all of you."

A scowl of rage mantled Boston Blye's face, but on the other hand a grunt of approval was unanimous from the crowd.

"That's fair, by Jinks!" called out one of the miners, who had been deceived by the package racket. "Long's the

gal minds her P's and Q's it's none of our bizness, an' ef we're fools enough to let her gouge us before our own eyes, we hain't got no cause to kick."

"That's so!" echoed several others. "The gal shall be given a square deal, or I'm a liar!"

"Thank you, boys; I thought you weren't all as black as Borton Blye. I have one more act to perform, and then will adjourn business until to-morrow evening, when you'll find me giving a whole show at the Fort. This man, Larkie, has not yet gained the use of his arms. A little Magic Oil will fix him."

She opened one of the bottles, and then pushing up his sleeves, bathed the distorted arms and wrists.

In a few seconds, at her command, he was enabled to use his arms as freely as any person.

Nevada Nell then waved her hand, and, leaving the stand, went to her room in the hotel, to be seen no more that night.

After being released from jail, George Gerald accompanied Deadwood Dick and his Dozen to their hidden retreat, and remained there until morning, when he and Dick repaired to the cave where the latter had left Agnes Blye.

To the disappointment of both, she was nowhere to be found. Not even a trace had been left behind to enable them to form a reasonable conclusion as to what had become of her.

"This is a bitter disappointment," Gerald said, gloomily. "I hoped to find her here, and take her under my personal charge."

"Well, it's evident you can't do it just yet awhile," Dick replied. "She has been spirited away, and our only thing to do is find her."

"She may possibly have wandered away and got lost."

"No, I think not. She promised to stay here until my return, and would have done so. I believe that, at this moment, she is in Phantom Flats."

"How! who could have possession of her?"

"I am not prepared to say, but will keep up a terrible thinking. Are you afraid to return to Phantom Flats?"

"By no means. It is my intention to return there at

once and keep a vigilant outlook, in hopes of discovering some trace of Agnes."

"Very well. Go, but take good care of yourself, and don't allow any one to bluff you down. Whenever I want to communicate with you I will make my identity known to you, as I shall have to peregrinate about in disguise."

George Gerald set out for Phantom Flats, leaving Dick to return by another route to the rendezvous.

On his arrival in the camp, Gerald made himself free to walk up and down the street, which he did to see whether he would be offered any molestation or not; but, though many inquiring glances were leveled at him, no one spoke to him or offered to create a disturbance on account of his interference in Deadwood Dick's behalf.

Feeling somewhat reassured, he spent the most of his time in wandering about town, in hopes of dropping accidentally upon some clue to Agnes's whereabouts, but up to the hour of Nevada Nell's little street "circus" nothing but dismal failure had greeted his efforts.

He was sitting in the Fort the same evening at a later hour, when he was approached by the ruffian who bore the sobriquet of Dandy Dan.

Daniel scrutinized the Easterner rather suspiciously as he approached, as if he were uncertain whether to address him or not. Finally he halted.

"Ee you ther chap w'ot come heer wi' Elye, the feller from 'Ginia City?' de hemanded.

"I came here with Boston Elye, yes."

"Well, ye'r' the chap I wants, then. Poker Kate wants ter see you, ter onc't."

"Who is Poker Kate?"

"The postmistress."

"Where is she?"

"Back door. Go out front, and round the building."

"Are you lying to me?"

"Play; givin' it to you straight."

"It will cost you dearly if you are not."

Gerald then left the saloon and walked through a dark side-alley toward the rear of the building.

He had gone but a short distance when a heavy cloak was thrown over his face, and he was seized by many pairs of strong hands and bodily spirited away.

CHAPTER IX.

Deadwood Dick Makes a Call.

The night was well advanced toward morning, and Phantom Flats lay asleep in a swath of ghostly moonlight. Not a person was abroad, even the Fort having long before closed its doors to the thirsty pilgrim.

From under the rear door of the post-office, however, came a narrow chink of light, and a dark-clad, masked man, in top boots and sombrero, who was lurking in the vicinity, took notice of it, and drew stealthily near the door.

"Poker Kate still lingers at her post," he mused, pausing on the threshold. "Mayhap she has fallen asleep."

He applied his ear to the key-hole, and listened intently. Not a sound was heard, nor did a glance through the narrow aperture give him a view of any one within.

This did not deceive the prowler, who was none other than Deadwood Dick. He was satisfied Poker Kate had not left the office, and, as it was his purpose to gain an interview with her, there was no more fitting time than now.

Drawing one of his revolvers and cocking it, ready for use, he next gave a couple of soft raps upon the door.

Almost immediately he heard a stir inside, and getting himself in readiness, Dick popped inside the moment Poker Kate opened the door.

She gave a startled, exasperated cry, but his weapon covered her before she could draw her own.

"Silence!" he ordered, sternly. "I mean you no harm. Close and lock the door."

She evidently believed it best to humor him, for she obeyed, and then turned upon him inquiringly.

"Well, sir, who are you, and what do you want?" she demanded, haughtily.

"I am Deadwood Dick, at your service—detective, ex-

desperado, dare-devil, and so-forth. I came to see you on business, so pray be seated and we will understand one another."

"I fail to understand what business you can have with me," she returned, coldly, as she became seated. "I have never before had the doubtful honor of your acquaintance."

"Maybe not. It matters not, though. Stranger though you may be, I have penetrated your thin disguise, and know who you are."

She uttered a sarcastic laugh.

"You must be a wizard and second sightseer, then, for I am confident that no one knows aught of my name or my past."

"Even in one's most fancied security they are not positive of their safety," Dick smiled.

Perhaps I am one out of a thousand who could tell you your name, Celia Blye!"

The startled cry she gave was evidence enough that he had not guessed wrongly.

Seeing that she was not about to speak, Dick lit a cigar, drew a few whiffs at it, and said:

"I see you are not inclined to be dishonest, by denying the truth. I am proud to know this. The stigma put upon your fair name by the villain, Boston Blye, will yet be wiped out by a confession I shall make it a point to extort from him. I am a man, Mrs. Blye, whom the barbed arrows of the world have pricked, until I may be in a degree calloused; yet I am still a man, with a kindly regard and appreciation for the honest oppressed."

"You are an enigma to me, sir."

"Perhaps. The solution I trust will secure happiness to you and your wronged husband."

"My husband, sir?"

"Exactly—Old Jewel, the hermit. It cannot be possible that you do not know him to be your husband who fled from Boston so many years ago?"

"I never suspected it until I baffled Boston Blye's game at the hermitage."

"Likely not. And now that you know it, what do you propose to do?"

"What can I do?"

"The simplest thing in the world. Go to him, bearing

your identity, and stand by him like a true and noble wife, a comfort and blessing in his declining years."

"I cannot! oh, sir, I cannot!"

"Would it be presuming too much to ask you why?" and the sleuth's eyes watched her veiled face keenly.

"I cannot tell you, sir, although could I tell anybody, I would tell you, since you seem so inclined to reunite us and baffle our enemy. For many long years my husband and I have been separated, and it is not improbable that we are likely to remain so during the rest of our lives. Circumstances will not warrant otherwise for the present, at least."

"Do you consider when you say this? Do you consider that you are leaving a lovely and accomplished daughter motherless, and a kind, heart-broken husband to end his life in solitude, unloved and un comforted?"

"I consider everything."

Dick was silent for several moments, while he studied odd and fanciful figures among the puffs of smoke that arose from his cigar.

Life's ups and downs had not left him without keen experience, and one with trouble's education can draw many conclusions that others would never dream of.

"I think I know the reason why you will not consent to a reunion," he said, at length. "If I am right, and I feel very positive that I am, you are, at the best, of a very mercenary nature."

"You are growing impudent, sir. The sooner this interview is terminated the better."

"Then no persuasion can tempt you to go back to your husband?"

"At present—no! When I feel inclined to do so, I will do it without the solicitation of a third party."

"Which is to the effect that you decline my friendship and co-operation?"

"Consider it in that light if you choose."

"Very well. I am working faithfully in the interests of an injured and wronged husband and father, as well as a lovely daughter. Also it shall be my aim to baffle those who are unfriendly to him and her. I fancy I know your secret, and am surprised that it should stand between you and the one you swore to love, honor and obey."

DEADWOOD DICK.

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And with these words Dick arose, bowed low, and quitted the room, closing the door behind him.

The next few days passed without incident worthy of mention.

Boston Elye and Black Bob were quietly working their scheme into proper condition to develop.

George Gerald appeared no more about town; and the strange Girl Fakir, Nevada Nell, was not to be seen, although the hotel proprietor declared to the inquiring ones that she was indisposed and confined to her room.

How many believed this is not for us to say, but there were not a few of the opinion that she had taken time by the forelock and skipped the camp.

The threat made in the false proclamation of Deadwood Dick was surely being put into effect. The first day one man had been killed; the second day, two; the third day, three, and thus in proportion with the number of passing days since the manifesto had been posted.

It was little wonder, then, that the honestly-disposed citizens were in a state of terror, and believing that Deadwood Dick was the author of the crimes, they would have put him to the most horrible death that the human mind could devise had they caught him.

But the furtive Richard realized the foul stain that was being put upon his character, and was careful not to betray his identity, although he was daily in the camp, in some one of his many disguises.

He was not idle, however; that was not natural for him. He was constantly on the alert, watchful and penetrating, and trying to solve the enigma of Agnes Elye's whereabouts.

A dozen theories entered his mind, but he could not bring himself into a conviction in regard to any of them. So far as the present was concerned, it appeared evident that the fate of poor Agnes was likely to remain a mystery.

Other matters divided his attention. By diligent figuring and research he learned that the Fort, with the ground it covered, was owned by Jose Picard, an inveterate gambler, and a brother to the man in whose name it was run.

The brothers were by no means friends; for while Pablo Picard was coining money, Jose was rapidly losing what

he had at cards. Dick also learned that the terms by which Pablo used the Fort, were that he was to have it for so much per day, and vacate the premises at his brother's will, upon an hour's notice.

Learning this much, the sleuth set about considering how he was to gain possession of the Fort, for in his own mind he believed that the secret mine of the Dumb Dozen was located beneath the structure, and was operated by Pablo Picard and Poker Kate, such a fact constituting the prime reason why the postmistress did not care to reunite with her husband.

If he could gain the ownership of the Fort, Dick knew that he could eject, or at least silence the present tenants, and perhaps arrange things more satisfactorily to all concerned.

Report said that Jose Picard was one of the squarest of square men; that he rarely left his own cabin, and only played with one man at a time, and had no witnesses to any game beyond his contestant.

In order to gain the honor of playing with him, it was necessary to write a note, asking for an open date, and naming the limit.

Dick considered all he had heard carefully before acting. He had plenty of money at his command, and if by risking it might he not be able to win the Fort, and after once gaining possession honorably, give Picard back a fair price for it?

It was a piece of strategy to be sure, and yet could be conducted as any other business arrangement.

So he sat down and penned the following note, and sent it to the Spaniard, who occupied a lone cabin at the upper end of the camp:

"Phantom Flats, Aug. 20, '8—.

"Jose Picard, Esq.—Sir: A gentleman of unlimited means, with a passion for cards, would like to meet you in a contest for any sum desired. Name date, and send answer back. . .

H. RICHARD."

The answer came within the hour.

"To-night, at ten. Fifteen raps on the door—two every other thirty seconds.

PICARD."

Short and sweet, so to speak, and yet Dick knew it meant business, and that he had an opponent to meet who was no amateur.

"It won't take long to settle it," he muttered. "It's make or break, and big money in the pot. "I'll meet Mr. Picard well heeled, however."

That same afternoon a marquee tent went up just across the street from the hotel, and a banner in front of it bore this inscription:

"NEVADA NELL,
F O R T U N E - T E L L E R ;
B U T O N E V I S I T O R A T A T I M E .
Terms, Ten Dollars, Gold."

The two huge trunks of the fair Fakir were removed to the tent, together with a table and several chairs, from the hotel, and toward evening the strange young woman was ready for business, her valet, Lascar, standing guard at the door.

The sight of the tent drew many curious ones to the vicinity, and several miners with more gold than good sense, paid their cash and got the worth of their money in bright prophecies of future luck, if their smiling faces when they came forth were any criterion.

One after another tried their luck, with apparently the same success.

This aroused the curiosity of old William Salamander Swilitab, who had been quietly and with a speculative eye watching things.

Was he still under the spell of the wizard queen?

Whether so or not he finally took off his battered plug hat, gave it a fling in the air, and uttered a yell that would have startled a Comanche.

"Herwhoop! I've dreamt a dream that I war ter strike it rich, an' I'm goin' ter see what ther gal sez. Ef she don't coincide wi' me, I'll sp'ile her purty picter. Hello, ther, younker, what's ther damage?"

"Ten dollars!" Lascar answered. "Coffins for unruly visitors cost a hundred extra."

"Gentle hint, sweet as the tinkle of a cowbell," murmured the giant, forking over the cash and stalking inside.

Upon a little platform, Nevada Nell occupied a chair. Another was placed near at hand.

An ominous black gown which entirely covered her

person except the eye-holes and an aperture to breathe through, formed her attire.

"Lord Jerusha! what the—" began the giant, pausing abruptly.

"Be seated," a firm but pleasant voice commanded. "Have no fear, for I already see that your future has many lines of pleasure permeating it."

"Snortin' snappin'-turtles! ye don't say? Ye ain't comin' no limburger-cheese taffy on me?"

"By no means!"

"Then I reckon I'll anchor right alongside yer. Go on."

"Your life has been fitful and stormy, attended by very little pleasantries and few streaks of good-fortune. No one ever loved you, and one reason you have been so rough and unruly is because you had no woman's hand to guide you. In your early future a kind and loving wife awaits you, nor is that all. You are on the eve of discovering a gold mine, which will put you out of want for many a year. How do you like the prospectus, Mr. Swilltub?"

The giant made no answer.

His eyes had a rigid, glassy look, and rested fixedly upon the Fakir. No better evidence was needed to tell that he was in a mesmeric trance.

A faint chuckle escaped from the fortune-teller's lips as the giant failed to answer her.

"William," she said, pinching him on the arm. "William Salamander Swilltub!"

"Yes, ma'am!" he responded, with school-boy docility.

"William, I have some questions to ask you. You know I am the devil and have got my grip fastened firmly on you. Therefore, it will be ruinous for you to tell me anything but the truth. You hear?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Of course you do. William, there is a plot under way, which Boston Blye is interested in, and in which you are acting as a tool. This plot has for its ultimate object two distinct purposes. Is this not so?"

"Yes, ma'am!"

"One of these is to gain possession of the lost mine of the Dumb Dozen?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Where does Blye believe this mine is located?"

"Under the Fort."

"How does he calculate to get possession of it?"

"It hain't been decided yet."

"Has any one become coadjutor with Blye in this scheme?"

"Yes. Ther's now five of us—Blye, Bill Roberts, otherwise black Bob, Leon Shrimp, Dandy Dan, and myself. I do the dirty work."

Nevada Nell was silent a moment while she pressed her hand to her head.

It was evident that it was a hard mental task for her to keep the giant under mesmeric control.

CHAPTER X.

The Game of Cards.

She finally regained the mastery, however, and went on:

"William, you are an obedient servant. You are also a man of good sense. You know who is your master, and are wise enough to obey. Now, there are a few more points I would get out of you, and you dare not refuse to give them to me. George Gerald has disappeared from the camp. Where is he? Out with the whole of it!"

Swilltub was silent—hesitated to answer, as if giving away the thing was hard against his will.

"What d'ye want?" he finally growled.

"I want to know what has become of George Gerald, and that right quick, or down into the pit you go!"

"Blye and Black Bob have him, but I hope to die if I know where. They're goin' to make him play cards to-night at the revolver's muzzle, an' make him sign checks for all he's worth, or notes, or whatever; then, they're goin' to hold him until everything is square concernin' the cashin' of 'em, when he kin go to blazes. After they get through with him to-night, they're goin' for old man Jewel, and either collar his pile or plant him, providing they can do it when they think Deadwood Dick ain't around."

"Jewel will never give up."

"Then he'll get planted. When the bottoms of his feet begin to burn to a crisp, I reckon money won't be no object to him!"

"Oho! So they intend to resort to that inhuman method, eh?" the Fakir mused. "Well, that is in accordance with their beastly natures. Another thing I want to know, Mr. Swilltub: Where is Agnes Blye?"

"Don't know nothin' 'bout it."

"Does Boston Blye or any of the rest of his confederates know?"

"Reckon not—leastways they all 'pear anxious 'bout her, 'cept Dandy an' I."

The information she had gained appeared to satisfy

Nevada Nell, for she waved her hand over his head and he was out of his trance.

"Hurray! I'm goin' ter git married an' strike it rich!" he yelled, as soon as he was out of his trance. "An' dash yer picter, gal, ef ye'r' deceivin' me, I'll break up ther hull shebang, sure pop!"

"You can bet that it will be all right," Nell assured. "Patience on your part is all that's required to prove that my prophecy is sure. You can go, now."

And Swiltub did go, which was something he would not have done had he known what he had said while in the trance.

Nevada Nell chuckled softly to herself after he was gone, apparently highly elated at what she had learned.

As that evening drew on apace, Deadwood Dick, in a rough, bearded miner's disguise, was lounging about the camp, and little did any one suspect that he was the noted ex-outlaw instead of the common laborer he appeared.

He was waiting for the hour to arrive when it should be time for him to visit Jose Picard, and win or lose a small fortune.

That he would win he felt confident; for, although Picard might be a "fleece" at cards, Dick had the confidence that no man lived who could long play with him and remain successful. As it came natural for the mechanic to handle his tools, or the author his pen, so it came "natural" for Deadwood Dick to manipulate the cards or handle the revolver.

Until it came time for him to visit Picard's cabin he alternated between the Fort and the street, in order to keep an eye on the movements of Poker Kate and Boston Blye.

He was not quite positive but that the postmistress suspected that he knew about the mine being located beneath the Fort, and if so, he knew she would likely make some move toward protecting her interests.

He also kept an eye open, hoping to see Boston Blye; but that individual was not abroad.

At the appointed hour, therefore, Dick set out for Jose Picard's cabin.

On his arrival there, and after delivering the raps, as he had been instructed, the door was opened, and he was

admitted into a small, roughly-furnished and dimly-lighted room.

Picard sat at a table shuffling a pack of cards.

By whom the door had been opened was not apparent to Dick, as Picard could hardly have reached the table and become seated in the time which elapsed between the opening and Dick's entrance.

"Good-evening!" Picard greeted, giving his visitor a keen glance. "You are Richard I suppose?"

"The same. I heard of your fame as a player, and having the conceit that I can play, I thought I'd come down and let you take the conceit out of me."

"Well, I can probably accommodate you. What's your pile, sir?"

"Anything from a dollar up to half a million will answer me."

Picard whistled.

"If you're as flush as that you don't look it!" he said, with something of a covert sneer.

"I make it a rule to say nothing but what I can back!" Dick responded, as he took a seat. "I have given you my figures; suppose you let us hear as to your quality?"

Picard opened a drawer at his side of the table.

"I am none too well fixed at present, sir," he said, rather regretfully. "I've had a reverse of luck lately, and am at low ebb. Still, I can raise a thousand dollars. That will buy you a breakfast, if I lose. I intended to sell the Fort to-day, but could not find a cash buyer."

"What's your price?"

"Seven thousand dollars."

"Pretty steep, isn't it?"

"That's my price."

"Well, draw me up a receipt for the amount, and give your deed, and I can oblige you."

Picard looked at Dick studiously.

"Did you come here to win the Fort? he finally asked.

"I came to play cards."

"Do you know my brother?"

"No."

"Or Poker Kate?"

"I have met her."

"Humph! You are not a man to want the place for what the place is. You have another object. I am too

old a world's man not to be a judge of character. Did you ever hear that Jose Picard was aught but a square man?"

"I heard you was square, else I should not be here now."

"Then tell me why you want the Fort?"

"One reason: I want to eject Poker Kate and Jose Picard."

"The other reason?"

"Perhaps I may tell you, after we play cards."

"Well, give me the cash. It's either make or break."

He drew up a receipt and a guaranty for a deed, gave them to Dick, who, after a careful perusal, handed him the money.

"There's little use of playing long for so small a consideration," Picard said. "Put up eight thousand dollars, and let one game settle it."

"As you like. What shall it be?"

"Seven-up, as well as any other game. You will doubtless win, anyhow. I've an idea that you are not all you look, or rather a little more."

"You may be wrong."

The money was staked.

A fresh pack of cards was then cut and dealt.

Scarcely a sound could have been heard during the game except the flip! flip! of the cards.

Eleven points were played, and when Dick had made his eleven Picard only had scored four.

"As I told you," he said. "The moment you sent me the challenge I was pretty well satisfied that I had met my fate. Now, then, I want to know who you are?"

"Who I am?" in feigned surprise.

"Yes. That you are not what you claim I'll take my oath!"

"And if I declare my identity?"

"That's all there is of it. No one will ever be the wiser for it."

"I believe you. You have had the honor of playing with that distinguished personage, Deadwood Dick!"

"The devil you say!"

"No—the Dick-ens"

"That accounts for the peculiar sensation I had when

you entered. I felt positive I had no ordinary personage in front of me."

"Perhaps not. Maybe you felt a tightening on your purse-strings. Well, as you hinted, my main object in coming here was to win the Fort, having done which, here is your money back, and the Fort is not for sale."

"Cleverly arranged, I must say. And now will you tell me what you want with the Fort? Your desire to eject Poker Kate is not worth seven thousand dollars."

"Certainly not. Poker Kate has a husband living, which I know to be true, but as long as she remains with Pablo Picard at the Fort she will not return to him."

"What attraction has the Fort? She surely does not get so much salary that it would make it an object?"

"Hardly, I fancy. Jose Picard, I think you are a man whom I can trust."

"You can stake your life on it, sir."

"Then, come what will, I'll tell you why I bought the Fort. You have doubtless heard mention, some time, concerning a certain Dumb Dozen, mythical or otherwise, who were searching for a lost mine of fabulous value?"

"I think I have heard of such a party."

"Well, I'll assure you that they are no myth, as I have lately become their captain and backer in their search. As to the lost mine, I believe it to be located beneath the Fort, and Poker Kate and Pablo Picard are working it!"

"I believe you are right. They have repeatedly tried to purchase the property of me, but I have each time refused to sell it, as my brother and I are not on good terms. If it is as you have said, you have struck a bargain."

"Not for myself; my only object is to return to the real owners their property."

"A laudable purpose, if they are really speechless, as you say, and I shall not regret that my loss has been their gain. I will give my brother orders to vacate the premises in the morning."

"Very well. You shall not lose anything by your honorable action."

After a little further conversation Dick took his departure, Picard promising to arrange for the ejection of his brother and Poker Kate from the Fort as early as convenient on the morrow.

Swillub had not lied when he said that George Gerald was in the power of Boston Blye.

Seated about a table, in a gloomy cave a mile south of Phantom Flats, were three of Blye's evil league, composed of himself, Leon Shrimp and Black Bob.

A yellow candle burned dimly on the table, and a fire of pine-logs blazed in the rudely constructed fire-place.

Upon Blye's face rested an expression of uneasiness.

"Don't fret yourself," Black Bob said. "If the game results either way it amounts to the same thing. We have got him, and before he shall escape he must sign over to us, in checks or mortgage, every cent he has, or pass in his checks!"

Blye was silent. Some deep emotion seemed to possess him. Did he, as a father for years, have any love for the child he had stolen away from his brother? His present conduct would seem to indicate that much. But after a few moments a vengeful expression swept over his face, and he brought down his clenched fist upon the table with emphasis.

"Bring out Gerald!" he ordered.

Shrimp arose and entered a narrow fissure, which led into an inner cavern.

Shortly he returned, and accompanying him was Dandy Dan. Between them walked George Gerald, with his hands firmly bound behind his back and a gag in his mouth.

He was led to the table where the flickering light fell upon his face, but even that failed to reveal anything but its expression of defiance. The gag was removed.

Boston Blye regarded him for a moment intently, an evil glitter in his snaky orbs.

"Gerald!" he said, finally, "do you know why you are here?"

"How am I to know when I have not been informed?" the Easterner demanded.

"Well, that's so, boy. You see how it is. Gerald I've become short of cash, through spending so much in my efforts to find Agnes, and knowing you to be well fixed in the world's goods, I had you brought here to try to induce you to make me a loan of what you are worth."

"Indeed! Isn't that what you might term remarkably cheeky?"

"Think of it as you like. I naturally concluded that you would not accede to my demands unless forced to do so, and being in desperate circumstances, I was compelled to adopt a little strategy."

"And supposed, by kidnapping me and bringing me here, you could frighten me into coming to your terms."

"I suppose nothing about it. We do not deal in suppositions here. You have two choices—life or death. If life is to your liking, you will be treated as squarely as in any gaming-place in America. If you prefer death, you have but to say the word."

"Then you propose to gamble for my money."

"Exactly. You must play cards or die. If you win, you will be set at liberty. If you lose, you lose all, and will be kept in custody until your checks are drawn and we have the cash, and are safely out of the way."

"Well, if that is the case, I can but accept the terms of the pack of wolves into whose clutches I have been drawn. Produce your cards. How much cash have you?"

"One dollar."

"What?"

"One dollar. You must stake your all against that amount. Since I have known you I have learned that you have seventy-five thousand dollars on book deposit in New York at the Park National Bank. Your check for this amount, payable to Elye, Roberts & Co., and deposited as a wager against a dollar, will be sufficient for the present."

Gerald was silent for a moment, during which time he felt a revolver muzzle pressed to his temple.

"Decide!" Black Bob growled. "We've no time to fool here, for so small a matter."

"I decline to accede to your infamous terms, Boston Elye. To do so would be unpardonable cowardice. No, sir—before you shall have a dollar of my money beyond what you robbed me of, when you captured me, you can take my life. This is final."

A fearful oath escaped Elye. He had not calculated on Gerald having so much nerve, evidently.

"Get ready, Shrimp!" he ordered, hoarsely. "If he makes no concession before I count three, put a bullet through his brain and end the matter. One!"

Silence followed so intense that the fall of a pin could have been heard.

"Two!"

Gerald's face was resolute and defiant, while the conspirators watched him anxiously.

"THREE! Fire!"

CHAPTER XI.

An Interruption—An Explosion—And the End.

The pistol held by Leon Shrimp still rested against the head of young Gerald, and but a touch of the finger was required to send the Easterner into eternity.

But the touch was not given.

As Boston Blye gave the order to fire, no less a personage than Deadwood Dick leaped into the room, and knocked the pistol from Shrimp's hand, and it exploded, as it fell to the floor.

Dick was immediately followed by his Dumb Dozen, who marched into the room in double file, and covered the conspirators with their revolvers.

Boston Blye's face assumed a ghastly hue, as he saw the ex-outlaw-detective, but he summoned the courage to rise to his feet with a pretense of indignation.

"What does this intrusion mean?" he demanded, fiercely. "Who are you, and what do you want?"

"You don't know me, then?" Dick queried with a dry laugh.

"How should I know you, sir— Ah! I do recognize you, now—you are the cut-throat, Deadwood Dick!"

"And you are the scoundrel, Boston Blye, together with your colleagues, Leon Shrimp, and Black Bob, the bandit. I think we know each other quite well, do we not, on short acquaintance?"

"Boston Blye, I came here to save the life of a man who befriended you, and who will eventually marry the child you stole from your brother. It is in my power now, to arrest you and cast you into prison, together with your associates, Black Bob, the bandit, and Leon Shrimp the bank robber, who was your tool. Now, Mr. Boston Blye, what have you to say?"

"Go ahead," the schemer gritted, withholding his passion as best he could.

He knew very well that he was in a dangerous position.

"Do you count yourself a man of honor, Boston Blye?" Dick asked, solemnly.

"Go ahead!" was the indifferent reply.

"Evasive answers won't do at this stage of the game," Dick warned. "I want to know where Agnes Blye is?"

"I do not know."

"Do you swear to it?"

"I do."

"Do you swear to forego your resolution to rob your own brother, known as Old Jewel, of his wealth?"

"I swear to nothing."

"Then you have until to-morrow night to get out of this part of the country. If seen here after that you will be strung up without mercy. Leon Shrimp, release that gentleman of his bonds."

"I've nothing to do with him," the younger villain asserted doggedly. "When the boss says so, I'm agreeable."

"Release him!" Dick repeated, his face growing hard and stern. "If you do not it will be the end of your tether."

"I am awaiting orders from you, Captain Blye," Shrimp said, turning to the schemer; but Dick made a leap forward, and seizing him by the throat, hurled him against the wall with terrible force.

Shrimp struck the wall with a dull thud, and, dropping, lay like one dead.

Dick then severed the thongs that bound the prisoner's wrists and removed the gag from his mouth.

"There, my friend, you are free. Now, Boston Blye, and your confederates, I'll give you, though uncalled-for mercy, just one hour to get out of my reach--out of the Territory. If I find you anywhere in this vicinity again I'll take you, dead or alive," and Dick quitted the place.

Black Bob listened until their footfalls were no longer heard; then he returned to the table, and faced Blye.

"Now, what?" he demanded, tersely. "This sort of work won't do. It's evident that this accursed Deadwood Dick is after us, and it is not improbable that the better share of the population of the Flats are in with him. At least, he got on to our racket with Gerald, beautifully, and that proves that there's an informer in our midst."

"It would seem so!" Blye admitted, with an ugly scowl. "It's not Swilltub, you bet, for he's coining money too fast to go back on us. That son of yours, I do not trust

any too much, let me tell you. He is as crafty a rogue as either of us, and if he thought to gain a few dollars by it, he'd bring us both to the hangman's scaffold."

Black Bob turned and regarded his insensible son darkly.

"I don't believe that of him," he growled. "If I thought he was treacherous I'd soon end his career."

"Well, you can use your own judgment in the matter. There's a traitor somewhere and it's a sure thing that it's either Shrimp or you."

"I'll be forever cursed if I'm the man," the bandit growled. "We'll soon find out who the traitor is!"

There was a wolfish expression upon his ugly face, as he arose and approached the still insensible Shrimp.

"What are you going to do?" Elye asked nervously, a sudden pallor creeping over his face.

"Kill him!" the ruffian returned. "It shall never be said that a son of Black Bob was a traitor!"

Even while speaking he whipped a revolver from his belt and fired three times, the bullets entering Leon's body in the vicinity of the heart.

The poor fellow scarcely struggled, and in a moment he was apparently lifeless.

The bandit then turned to Elye.

"Come! There are but three of us now, and we'll go straight to Jewel's ranch and settle up this matter."

"Wouldn't it be advisable to wait until another time? Deadwood Dick or some of his emissaries may be lying in wait for us."

"Bah—no! The whole dozen were with him a few moments ago. Jewel is alone."

"Possibly, now, but having the start Deadwood Dick can return there before we can reach the place."

"That shows how much you know about it. I happen to be posted in regard to a short route by which we can reach the hermitage an hour before the other crowd. Let them do their level best. Come along, and be quick about it!"

Old Jewel sat in front of his hermitage at a late hour that night, puffing away at a pipe which had the appearance of being nearly as aged as himself. A worried ex-

pression rested upon his face, however, and he started nervously at the least sound.

"Something warns me of impending danger," he murmured, "and yet I do not fear them all. I—I—sometimes think my latter days will culminate in insanity. Old, feeble, friendless—what else can I expect but insanity?"

A footstep startled him and he instantly sprang to his feet with the glare of a hungry tiger in his gaze.

It was not the step of an enemy, he quickly concluded, for no caution was observable.

Whoever it was he came from the direction of Phantom Flats, so Jewel stepped within the door of his hut.

A rifle was standing near, and he seized it, evidently determined to sell his life dearly if, indeed, the person approaching was an enemy.

Suddenly the footsteps ceased to be heard. Half an hour passed and there was no repetition of the sounds. Jewel was puzzled.

He was satisfied that the footsteps had not been a freak of his imagination; they had been too plain and natural for him to be deceived.

There were loop-holes, partly screened by vines, in different parts of the hut, but a careful reconnaissance through them failed to discover any signs whatever of an enemy.

Nothing now remained for him to believe but that he had been deceived by his own imagination; so he resumed his position in front of the hut.

"Strange that Deadwood Dick and the Dumb Dozen do not return," he mused. "It is now past midnight, and I should think some of them, at least, would be back."

The words were hardly out of his mouth when he was seized from behind and a man's hand was slapped over his mouth, so that he could not utter a word.

His hands were then drawn behind his back and tied; all of which was done before he could get a glimpse of his captors.

It needed no glimpse of them, however, to tell him who one of them was.

The image of his evil brother arose before his mind's eye; it was Boston Blye who first stepped before him, to be followed by his confederates, Black Bob and Dandy Dan.

Swilltub was not present.

"Well, my jewel, we have you at last, eh?" the arch-schemer said, leering malignantly into the captive's face. "You presumed that you was safe when you refused my terms the other night. We are here after the wealth you have hoarded up, and we intend to have it before we leave. As time is pressing, we must make the present interview brief. I would like to tarry longer with you, but circumstances will not permit. So hand over your hoard and we will depart."

"Never! Not a dollar—not a grain shall you ever touch!" His voice was firm and decisive.

An evil gleam shot from the eyes of Boston Elye.

"We shall see!" he grinned. "Dandy, gather some fagots and kindle a fire. Be sure to make it as hot as possible. Roberts, hold a pistol at the jewel's head until we are ready to warm his feet. Jewel, old boy, I'll make you acquainted with Roberts, the man you once endeavored to murder in Boston."

"It is a pity I didn't murder both of you," the hermit retorted. "The world would have been spared a deal of sin and sorrow."

Boston made no answer, but watched Dandy Dan prepare the fire, the malevolent expression upon his face making it almost fiendish.

In a few minutes Dandy Dan had gathered a considerable pile of pine-cones and light wood, and the application of a match caused it to blaze up brightly.

"You see the fire, brother?" Boston Elye demanded significantly. "To you it means the foretaste of roast, unless you tell us where to lay hands on your gold."

"Roast it is, then. I shall never give you the information you crave."

"Then we will warm the soles of your feet so that you will never be troubled with chilblains. Dandy, get to work!"

Without delay Black Bob threw the hermit on his back and Dandy Dan removed his moccasins from his feet.

The two wretches then bore Jewel toward the fire, and placed his feet uncomfortably near the blaze.

"Now, boys, you needn't hurry yourselves about toasting his feet brown all at once. Take your time and do them up rare, at first. He will relish the sport all the more."

Jewel could scarcely repress a shudder, even though his face expressed nothing but defiance.

That his own brother could be so unspeakably heartless was beyond his understanding. Yet he was resolved not to yield, no matter what torture they might inflict.

"Now, Jewel, old boy, how do you feel? Do you think you can bear the racket without wilting?"

"I have said all that was necessary, I believe," Jewel answered. "You have it in your power to torture me, but not to conquer me—no! never!"

"Then, after you're sufficiently singed, we'll erect a slab over your tomb—'Died, a martyr to money.' Dandy, shove his feet into the fire."

Dandy hesitated a moment, and then, apparently nerved for the task, stooped to obey.

His hands had scarcely touched Jewel's legs, however, before there was the sharp report of a rifle, and Dandy Dan tumbled to the ground, never to sin in this world again.

The next instant two figures, roughly clad in miner's garb, dashed in upon the scene with drawn revolvers.

"Fly for your life!" Blye yelled to Black Bob, and he suited action to the word by making off down the gulch at the top of his speed, Black Bob following at his heels.

Two shots whizzed after them, but did not arrest their flight.

The rescuers drawing old Jewel away from the fire, cut his bonds.

"You had a narrow escape!" one of them said. "It was lucky we happened near, or you would hardly have felt like jig-dancing for some days to come."

"Probably not," Jewel replied, "and I thank you gratefully for coming to my aid."

"You are welcome, surely. Do you know who I am, Jewel?"

"You are a stranger to me, therefore I can not say what is your name."

"Yes, I am a stranger to you these many years. But it is through no fault of mine, Jewel; do you know me now?"

The speaker removed a sombrero and a false beard from the face, and the handsome, undisguised features of Colin Blye, alias Poker Kate, were revealed.

The hermit sprang forward and seized her hands in his, while he gazed searchingly into her face.

"Celia! Celia! My God! can this be true, or is it only a mocking delusion?"

"It is no delusion, my dear husband; I am Celia Blye. 'Twas only lately that I learned who you were."

"God be praised, for he has blessed me in my last days," the hermit said fervently, after embracing her. "And to think you should be my rescuer!"

"To me the credit is not all due," the postmistress said. "Our daughter here deserves as much as I. Agnes, come forward."

Once more there was a proceeding of removing false beard, and Agnes Blye stood before her father, with tears of joy in her sweet eyes.

We will pass over the scene that followed and the loving words that were spoken. Suffice it to say that blessings were offered to the Almighty for his mercy.

"You must now accompany me back to Phantom Flats," Packer Kate—as we will continue to call her—said. "There you will have both safety and comfort, until we can make arrangements to seek another and pleasanter home far from here."

"No, I cannot leave the hermitage until Deadwood Dick and the Dumb Boys return. I will then get them to transport my gold to some secret cache, where it will be safe until I want it."

"Dare you trust that fellow? You may not have heard of the reputation he bears."

"I would trust him with a dozen fortunes if needs be. He has acted the part of a gentleman toward me, and if I leave this vicinity I shall richly reward him. I fear we will have trouble before we get away."

"Who from?"

"Who else but my evil brother, who has already made my life so miserable."

"Then you fear him?"

"No; not so far as my courage goes. I anticipate, however, that he will try to rob me whenever I attempt to leave this vicinity."

"Let's make arrangements, then, for you to go at once. I will join you a few days hence."

"No; I do not intend to leave until I see Dick properly

rewarded, and until he succeeds in recovering for the brave Dumb Dozen their lost mine."

"He shall never do that!" Poker Kate replied fiercely. "Tell me—does he suspect where the mine is?"

"He fancies that he knows."

"Where did he say it was?"

"Beneath the Fort."

Something like a groan escaped the lips of Poker Kate.

"Curse the fellow! It shall be a bitter struggle before he shall have the mine. It belongs to me, by right of possession, and there shall be a bitter war before I give it up!"

"Celia, my wife, listen to reason. The lost mine belongs to those who cannot speak for their own interests. Give up the mine to them, for I have ample wealth to gratify all our wants."

"Dictate not to me, sir! I say no one shall own a penny in the mine but myself. You have nothing to say in the matter whatever, and if you interfere it will be the worse for you."

"This is strange language to use to your newly-found husband, Celia."

"Husband or no husband, I am my own master, and will fight before I will yield up the lost mine. If you do not choose to join in my cause you can do without a wife for the remainder of your life."

"So be it, then! Even for your sake I could not be induced to enter into so dishonorable action as to defraud the unfortunate Dumb Dozen."

"Then we are enemies henceforth. If you meet your death through your absurd allegiance to Deadwood Dick and his gang it is your own fault. Agnes, come with me."

"I prefer to remain here," Agnes replied, quietly. "Father must need me, and if there is another rupture between my parents I shall remain with papa."

"We shall see how long you will remain with him. If forced to it, I can raise a war in and about these parts that never was dreamed of. I go back to the Phantom Flats now; when I come again you will both come over to my side."

And shaking her finger at them threateningly, she turned and hurried away.

Old Jewel gazed after her with a sigh.

"I can scarcely believe the evidence of my senses. What will not the insane passion for money do?"

"A great deal of harm, father; but do not despair or worry. You have just seen it proven that my mother is not worthy of your noble self, and so let us bury our sorrows and try to make each other happy. When Deadwood Dick returns we shall have a brave and fearless protector."

"True, my child. And until then we must guard against another surprise, for the enemy may still be lurking in the neighborhood."

After rescuing George Gerald, Deadwood Dick and his Dozen rode away to a quiet copse in the gulch within view of Phantom Flats, and leaving the Dozen there for a time, Harris disguised himself and he and Gerald entered the young city.

Arriving there they found a scene of great excitement at the Fort. A bonfire had been kindled and the street was filled with an excited populace.

Dick and Gerald pushed forward to investigate.

The door of the Fort was closed and the windows shuttered. Jose Picard alone paced the veranda, his eyes constantly roving over the crowd, while his hands clutched a formidable pair of revolvers.

"Gentlemen!" he cried, "there is no cause for all this excitement. You all know that I owned the shebang, and if I've chosen to eject the tenants, after selling it to another party, I want to know whose business it is but my own? When the owner comes he shall have possession, which same I propose to hold until he does arrive."

"We shall see about that, curse you!" Pablo Picard howled from the street. "You are a cheat and a thief. Just wait till Poker Kate returns; then, if she says take the 'Fort,' you bet thar ar' boys enough as will help us take it."

"There are not enough of your sort in Phantom Flats, Pablo Picard, to do this little job. Are there any gentlemen in the crowd who propose to aid me in retaining my own property—in holding the Fort?"

"I for one!" one of the prominent mine-owners of the camp said, mounting the steps. "Hurrah, boys, you that

want to see a square man have his rightful and lawful protection."

A dozen leading citizens followed.

"That don't signify," Pablo Picard sneered. "Their genuine fightin' stock of the town ye will perceive don't budge an inch ter yer racket—do ye, boys?"

A hoarse growl was the answer.

Dick nudged Gerald, and called him aside for a moment.

"Go to Jose Picard—mention the name of Richard—and tell him to admit everybody to the Fort, and whoever comes afterward to join his party, except Boston Blye, Roberts and their confederates. I will take a reconnaissance, and see you later."

Gerald nodded and walked away. Reaching the steps he ascended to the veranda, and spoke for several moments with Jose Picardo.

The latter hesitated a few moments, then gave Gerald the keys with which he unlocked the door.

"Step inside, out of bullet range, gentlemen," he said. "There bids fair to be trouble in this matter, and we might as well prepare for it, and if possible, crush out the ruffian element in this camp."

Every man near him seemed to think his advice timely, for all hastened to enter. Gerald locked the door after them, he and Picard, however, remaining on the outside.

"There's going to be a terrible fight over this affair," Picard said in a low tone. "I'll hold the place for Deadwood Dick, however, if possible."

One after another the citizens came upon the veranda, and were admitted to the building, until there were at least half a hundred within when they suddenly ceased to come, and there was a noticeable thinning out of the crowd in the street, even Pablo Picard disappearing.

Jose Picard was puzzled, and directed Gerald to make a reconnaissance through the rear of the Fort.

He did so, but saw no alarming signs.

Just as he returned to the veranda Deadwood Dick came running up, for the street was now deserted.

"Clear the building as quickly as possible!" he cried. "The entrance to the mine is in another place, as well as in under the Fort, and in five minutes the Fort will be blown to atoms!"

Gerald immediately notified those inside, and in less time perhaps than it takes to write it, the "Fort" was evacuated, and its late inmates were at a safe distance.

They were none too soon. There was suddenly a flash, preceded by a puff of smoke—then a terrific report that made the very earth tremble. Mingled with the report was the crashing sound of rondered timbers, as the Fort was thrown into fragments.

Large volumes of splintered timbers and boards rose heavenward, even the heaviest beams being carried high into the air.

The Fort was not the only thing disturbed. The rocky bottom beneath it was upheaved, as by an earthquake, to the height of a dozen feet or more.

Nothing was seen of Poker Kate, Pablo Picard, or their allies that night, but the next day, when the long lost mine was explored by Deadwood Dick and the Dumb Dozen, Poker Kate, Boston Blye and Bill Roberts were found in it—dead!

Their bodies were literally riddled with bullets; and it was the belief of everybody that Pablo Picard was the author of the work, for everything of value had been removed from the mine, and Picard and a large percentage of the ruffian element were missing, and were never afterward seen in the neighborhood of Phantom Flats.

That they made a haul of an immense fortune in gold is not to be doubted—the secreted product of years of labor.

A meeting of the citizens was called, and Deadwood Dick, undisguising himself, related all he knew concerning the Dumb Dozen, and it was decided that they were entitled to possession of their mine.

At Dick's motion—for, dear reader, Nevada Nell the Fakir and mesmerist, and Deadwood Dick were one and the same person—old Swilltub came to the fore and related what he knew of the villainous schemes of Boston Blye; enough, anyhow, to exonerate the redoubtable Dick, whereupon he was heartily honored by the citizens of Phantom Flats for his success in baffling villainy.

Later he was tendered the position of mayor, but respectfully declined the honor.

A few weeks later Agnes Blye became the bride of George Gerald and the happy couple departed for the

East, accompanied by Jewel, who, before leaving, did not forget to reward Dick—nor did the Dumb Dozen.

Accompanied by old Swilltab, who declared his intention to follow Dick through thick and thin, the restless wanderer soon after left for the silver districts of Idaho, where, some time we may meet him again.

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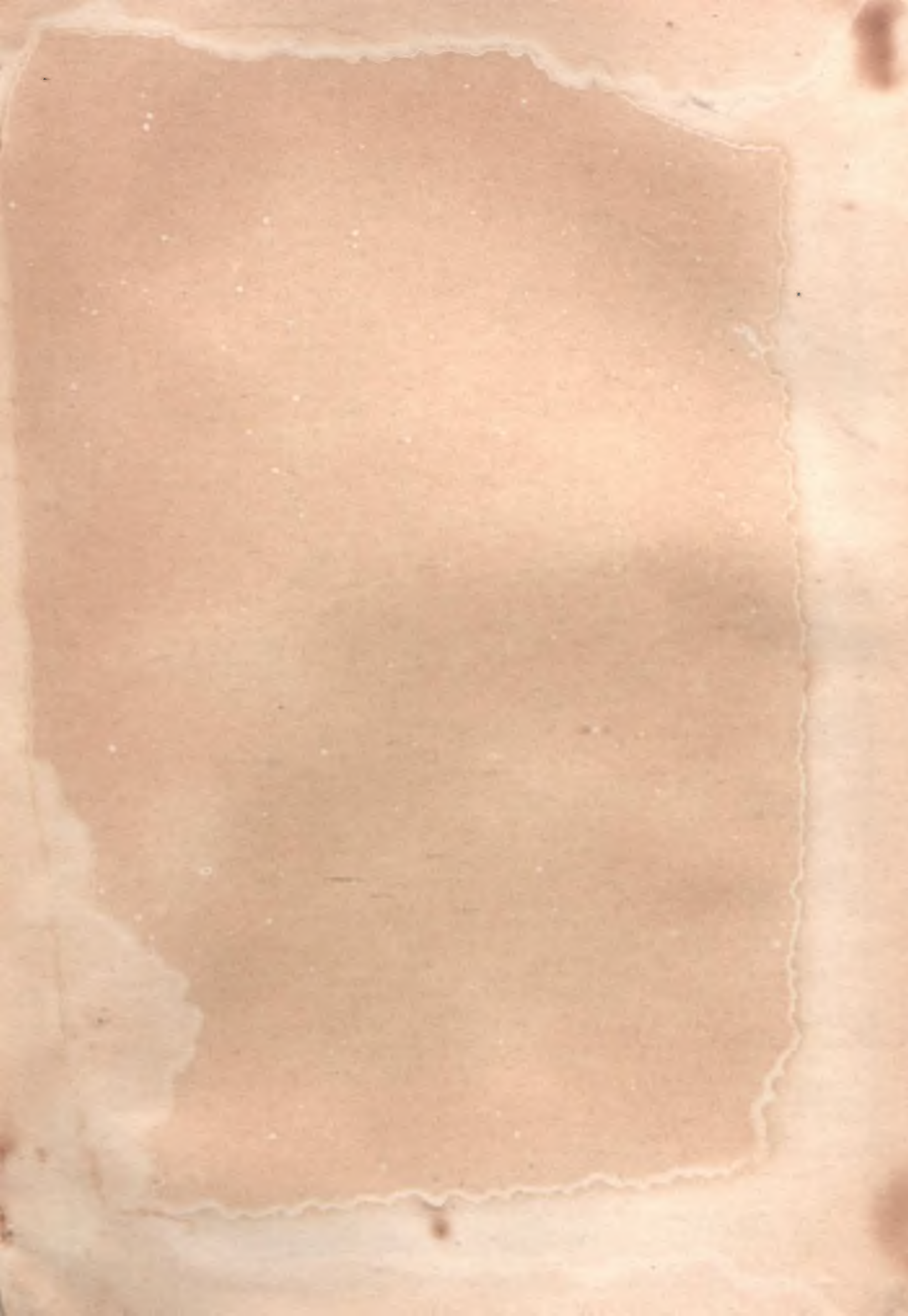
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